QUO VADIS

HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

Christmas gift in 1938
to my eldest grandson

Herbert Oas Jr.

from grandma.

May only shining
hours,
Your Merry Christmas bless.
And may your New Year
hold,
The Light of happiness.

QUO VADIS

Dear Bud-
When you are forty, and
dont know what to do.
Start reading this book
that I am giving you.
grandma.

QUO VADIS

A Tale of the Time of Nero

By HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

Translated from the Polish by

DR. S. A. BINION *author of "Ancient Egypt," and* S. MALEVSKY

NEW LARGE TYPE EDITION WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS • NEW YORK

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PREFACE

There are two requisites in a good translation. First, it should be good English. Second, it should be loyal to the original. These two requisites are in fact one. For the translation of such a masterpiece as "Quo Vadis" it cannot be loyal to the spirit of the original unless it be good English. But loyalty to the spirit must frequently involve disloyalty to the letter. The famous Portuguese hand-book known to us as "English as She is Spoke," is sufficient evidence of the betrayal of sense which may result from too strenuous an attempt at verbal fidelity.

This translation, therefore, aims to be faithful to both English and Polish. The needless iterations which are legitimate in Polish have been dropped as illegitimate in English. Thus a large number of "ands," "buts," and "meanwhiles" have been weeded out, as well as all such phrases as "so saying," or "with these words," which retard the reader without enlightening him. "He began to do so and so" has been altered into "He did so and so." More important still, Polish idioms and locutions, meaningless to English ears, have been rendered into the nearest possible equivalents with the same object of aiding the reader, and the Latin terms have been carefully translated in the text itself.

No one but a Latin scholar is familiar with such words as "epilatores," "curriculum," "fauces," "frigidarium," "peractum est," "habet," "innoxa corpora," and many others that are sprinkled throughout the Polish original. They are stumbling blocks in the reader's path, to whom the distraction of even a foot-note or an intercalary translation are a drawback. They mar the reader's pleasure. The main object of this translation is to bring this great masterpiece within the comprehension of all readers.

But absolute accuracy to the spirit has also been aimed at. Many serious, and even vital errors in the current translations have been eliminated, and words and phrases have been restored to their true meaning in the clearest English attainable. It is the hope of the translators that there is not one sentence which the lay reader would have to pause at or stumble over.

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the World War the newspapers and literary reviews gave brief space, on a certain date, to the fact that Henryk Sienkiewicz, the Polish author, had passed away. To most readers who chanced to notice the item, he was recalled only as the author of "Quo Vadis"; and even yet we of America do not grasp the real significance of his work as an awakener of Polish liberty.

The future fame of Sienkiewicz will rest upon this factor as well as his ability to write historical fiction. In the latter field he bids fair to take very high rank. He is to Poland what Walter Scott is to England; Hugo to France; or Cervantes to Spain. Says Charles Harvey Genung in the "Warner Library," "With all the confidence that we can ever attach to human judgment upon a living author, Sienkiewicz may be pronounced the greatest creative genius in the field of fiction at the end of the nineteenth century." Mr. Genung, however, does not base his opinion upon "Quo Vadis," but upon the author's great trilogy of Polish stories—epic in their sweep and vision—"With Fire and Sword," "The Deluge," and "Pan Michael." It is as a recreator of Poland's past that the author himself would doubtless prefer to be remembered.

The facts of Henryk Sienkiewicz's life are somewhat meager; no authorized biography has yet appeared. The scene and date of his birth are in dispute. He was born in Lithuania in 1846, or in Poland proper in 1848. At an early age his family removed to Warsaw, where he attended the lower school or "Gymnasium," and completed his education in the University of Warsaw. He won a degree in literature but did not attain high rank as a student. He preferred to read historical novels, such

as those of Scott and Dumas. Even then his literary bent was forming, and he never aspired to any other career than literature.

For the next few years he led a roving life and tried his hand at journalism, first at Warsaw, where he edited the *Niwa,* then for a time at Petrograd, and next as a correspondent in France. About the age of thirty he came to America—a fact which is not generally known—and thought of making this his home. He came over from France with Madame Helena Modjeska and her husband and a few other compatriots. The group settled near Los Angeles in a community which they called "Anno Luni." It was a sort of "Brook Farm" experiment, where all were to live from a common pocket-book; but like other such communal tests it was doomed to failure. Modjeska studied English and went on the American stage; while Sienkiewicz returned to Poland. While in California he had written travel letters to a Polish journal, over the pen name of Litwos.

At thirty-six he was still comparatively unknown, but seemingly content. He preferred to lead a wandering life, to observe, to absorb. He said of himself: "I think there must be some gypsy blood in my veins"—such was his restless nature. But he never idled in his travels; always was there the seeing eye backed by a remarkably retentive memory. During this formative period he wrote short stories, one of the best of which was a humorous skit, "No Man is a Prophet in His Own Country." "I toiled at short stories until I could write a good one, before I attempted longer productions," he says.

With the year 1872 he definitely essayed larger authorship. He contributed a series of critical articles to a Polish review. The next year his first novel, "In Vain," appeared. Its title may have presaged its lack of success. "Hania," slightly more successful came out in 1874. Seven years later Sienkiewicz married a Lithuanian lady who is spoken of as being both beautiful and talented. She urged him to begin his series of Polish historical

novels and aided him with the ground work. Their wedded life was unfortunately cut short by her death in 1885, but not before the first of this trilogy, "With Fire and Sword," appeared. The two remaining titles, "The Deluge," and "Pan Michael" were completed by 1888.

We in America, who are accustomed to link the name of Sienkiewicz with "Quo Vadis" only can scarcely appreciate the profound effect exerted upon his countrymen by these novels. Nearly three centuries before, Poland had been laid waste. Her territory had been partitioned among Russia, Germany, and Austria. She had been ground under the heel of the oppressor, not daring to call her soul her own. Efforts had been made repeatedly to stamp out the Polish language. Anything savoring of native propaganda was rigidly censored. At such a time as this, these powerful stories of Poland's struggle for freedom in the past came like a trumpet call. The pen of Sienkiewicz was worth legions of soldiers. At one bound he attained front rank among their writers, a worthy successor to Mickiewicz of some thirty years before.

Many are the tales told of Poland's efforts to keep alive her national spirit and literature, in the troubled days before the World War. The strictures of Russia were particularly zealous against them, and Polish writers, publishers and book-dealers were always under suspicion. An ingenious theory of their methods is propounded by a recent writer in the *International Book Review,* who says: "A Polish publisher can entertain his American guest by the hour with stories of how he worked the literary 'underground' in his early days, keeping Polish books in circulation in spite of the rigorous watchfulness of the Russian police. But there was another and an even more venturesome way of outwitting the alien censor —what might be called the system of *double entendre.* Any Pole will point out for you to-day dozens of instances where the Polish soul continued to speak to the nation by this means, in spite of the hawk-eye of Russian,

Prussian or Austrian officialdom. Krasinski's classic tragedy, 'Iridion,' is one of the most famous of these: in this drama the tyrant Rome is really the tyrant Russia. In Slowacki's 'Grave of Agamemnon,' the exiled poet, beholding the ruins of Greece, sings really of his mother country. Mickiewicz, in his 'Konrad Wallenrod,' told a story which every Pole perfectly understood; it was published in Moscow under the very nose of the Muscovite, all its burning Polish sentiments unwittingly approved and even applauded by that ponderous self-deceiver.

"But—to the American, at least—perhaps the most striking of all the examples of camouflage in Polish literature is Sienkiewicz's 'Quo Vadis.' In this famous novel of ancient Rome, known the world over and translated into more foreign tongues than any other book except the Bible, what is it that the author really pictures in the 'underground' life of the persecuted Christians, and the heroic struggles of Ursus the Sarmatian, who conquers the bull in the arena and saves the virgin Lygia from destruction? It is really the story of Poland, told in hidden allegory and understood by the Poles, no matter how little others suspect its significance. The key to it is Ursus, 'the Sarmatian,' Sarmatian being only another name for Pole, but one lost in the obscurities of antiquity. Cæsar and the bull are obvious figures of Poland's oppressors; Lygia is as obviously the spirit of Poland, the soul of Polish nationality preserved through the strength and heroism of Polish manhood. It was this infinite ingenuity of the Polish poets and novelists, finding a thousand expressions in allegory, guarded word and veiled meaning, that gave rise to the classic Russian warning, 'Never trust a Pole!' "

This theory of "Quo Vadis" is, as we have said, ingenious but it is hardly plausible. The allegory if such is too far-fetched; there are too many elements which no stretch of the imagination could prove analogous. "Quo Vadis" dealt with a far mightier theme than the political woes of Poland. It was concerned

with the foundation of the Christian Church itself. Its theme was the struggle of ancient Paganism against the Cross of Christ.

However, before "Quo Vadis" appeared, in 1896, two other Polish tales of intense realism had come from the author's now teeming pen; "Without Dogma," and "Children of the Soil." While they strengthened his popularity at home, it remained for the tale of Rome in the days of Nero to carry his fame beyond the bounds of Poland and make him a world figure in literature.

Other books followed: "Knights of the Cross," in 1900: "On the Field of Glory," in 1904: "Whirl-Pools," in 1908; and "Through Death and Wilderness," in 1912, which was his last. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1905. Further literary efforts were hampered by advancing years and the outbreak of the War. He did not live to see the emancipation of his native land, of which he had so fondly dreamed, but he may have visioned its dawn.

At the outbreak of hostilities he went to Geneva where with other distinguished exiles—Paderewski, world pianist and later Premier of Poland, Jean de Reszke, the greatest tenor of his day, and Marcella Sembrich, prima donna of opera,—he labored for the cause of Polish relief. He was President of their Council of Relief. This was his sole occupation to the day of his death, November 16, 1916.

Before the War, he had been as in youth a world traveller. His home in the winter was Warsaw; and in the summer he had a place high up in the Carpathian Mountains—chiefly for the sake of his two children, to whom he had been deeply attached after the early death of their mother. But he was liable at a moment's notice to set out on a journey, to Rome, to Greece, to Egypt, to the Orient. He was in its broadest sense a citizen of the world, and at home anywhere. On one occasion he went on a big-game hunt to Africa. He was a lover of scenery, sport, and adventure; but chiefly he liked to study peoples. He held himself aloof from society and hated

to be lionized, but he was not a hermit or a misanthrope. He had a deep regard for all mankind.

When on his travels he made extensive notes which he would bring back home for digesting. He was accustomed to write four or five hours at a stretch, smoking strong cigars the while, in the mornings, and devote the later hours of the day to relaxation or study. He had no secretary but wrote all his manuscripts by hand and in *red ink,* with little or no correction. "I do my own revising in my brain as I walk," he once said. He actually wrote "Quo Vadis" within one year—a work of 225,000 words, or the length of three ordinary novels. But this does not comprise the months of study and first-hand observation which had gone before. He did not describe Rome as a Pole or as some passive spectator. He was for the nonce a Roman citizen living in the first century and describing events with the assuredness of an eye-witness.

When we read "Quo Vadis," we personally enter the Court of Nero; we wander through the streets of ancient Rome; we visit its markets, temples, and amphitheatres. We witness the burning of the imperial city and stand beside the actor-Emperor as he composes and sings hymns in honor of the mighty conflagration; then we follow Peter and Paul through the Trans-Tiber, and behold the sufferings of the persecuted Christians. It is not a mere transcript of history, a faithful record of events, but life itself.

Such is the background of a tale so tremendous in its sweep as to defy any brief analysis. It is a cross-section of human history at a critical epoch. Its motif far transcends the romance around which it is written. Lygia, the persecuted heroine, we feel is only a lay figure; she typifies the universal trial and suffering at the hands of Nero. Both she and Vinitius, her devoted lover, must inevitably become merely types. The real hero of the book is the splendid Petronius, the Arbiter of Elegance, he who could live like a prince and die with a smile on his lips and a jest on his mouth, like a Stoic. Literature

affords few figures finer than this. And almost as compelling is that of Chilo Chilonides, philosopher, rascal, liar, spy, sycophant, apparently rotten to the core, who yet could die redeemed.

Nothing short of amazing, also, is the erudition displayed by Sienkiewicz in the construction of this story. He knows ancient Rome, its palaces, hovels, temples, markets, and maze of streets as intimately as his own Warsaw. He does not generalize; he names and describes every location with the minuteness of personal familiarity. Do Cæsar and his Court go to Antium? Here as elsewhere Sienkiewicz is also at home, pointing out every village along the way. It is such meticulous attention to details which lifts the story far above the level of the ordinary novel and gives it undoubted claim to immortality. It recreates for us an historical epoch in a more unforgettable way than Gibbon's "Decline and Fall."

Says one anonymous critic: "Whether he touches upon some problem of art or religion or modern ethics, whether he deals with the history of a past epoch or the archæological details of the first century, he has mastered his subject as far as human knowledge can master it, and is able to touch and transfigure it with new light." And again: "We know of no one except Shakespeare and Goethe, who has drawn so many and such varying types; and we know of no one except Shakespeare who in his delineation of woman has so deeply fathomed her soul."

"Sienkiewicz," says a writer in the *Literary Review*, "is a fair sample of that phenomenon which Brandes describes as characteristically Polish, an ideal realist—or a realistic idealist. Over and above all his genius for the creation of robust characters and the inexhaustible invention of dramatic action, stands his peculiar power of running the gamut of human emotion without falling into morbidity or exciting illicit passion. But this is not strange in a writer who could enunciate such a literary philosophy as he did in his criticism of Zola: 'The novel must strengthen life, not enfeeble it; must ennoble, not

defile it. The suffocating need pure air . . . it is only in an exhausted field that weeds grow.' "

His own literary creed may be summed up in these words from an essay: "Because I come of a society in which so much power is wasted, every planned and completed work fills me with real respect and has for me also some wonderful and exceptional charm. Whenever I write Finis at the close of a book of mine, I feel something like a sensation of delight not only because the labor is done, but because of the sensation which comes of a finished work. A whole series of books especially those written in the name of a leading idea is a life task accomplished. It is a harvest home festival in which the leader of the workmen has earned the right to a garland and a song, 'I bring fruit! I bring fruit!' "

J. Walker McSpadden

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QUO VADIS

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

IT was not until about noon that Petronius finally woke. He felt greatly fatigued as usual. The evening before he had been with Nero at a feast which had continued late into the night. For some time past his health had not been good. He said of himself that he felt like a log of wood in the mornings, and barely had sufficient strength to collect his thoughts. However, a bath and the careful massage administered by skilled slaves gradually quickened the flow of his sluggish blood, refreshed him and restored his courage. From the last stage of the bath he issued a new man, his eyes sparkling with wit and animation, rejuvenated, vivacious; so superior that Otho could not equal him; in fact, honestly meriting his sobriquet, arbiter of elegance.

Petronius seldom went to the public baths, and then only to hear some speaker whose reputation had aroused the gossip of the city, or when there were games of particular interest going on in the great hall. In ordinary circumstances he preferred his private baths on his own estate, which Celer, the renowned companion of Severus, had enlarged and rebuilt for him. With so much taste were they equipped, that in spite of the fact that the imperial baths were larger and immeasurably more luxuriously planned, Nero himself owned Petronius's superior.

As Petronius, bored by Vatinius's joking, had taken part after last night's feast in a discussion with Nero, Lucan and Seneca as to whether women possessed souls, he woke as has been said, late, and according to his habit

made use of the baths. Two colossal slaves having laid him upon a cyprus wood table, which was covered with immaculate Egyptian linen, dipped their hands in perfumed oil and began to rub him. Meanwhile, closing his eyes, he waited till the warmth of the steam and the friction of the rubbers' hands should penetrate his body and drive away fatigue.

After a short time he opened his eyes and asked of the weather. Later he inquired concerning the precious stones which Idomeneus, the jeweller, had promised to bring him o examine. As the breeze was from the Alban mountains, the weather promised fair; as for the precious stones they had not yet been sent. At the same instant the slave whose duty it was to announce the names of the visitors to the baths appeared from behind the curtain to say that young Marcus Vinitius, who had just returned from Asia Minor, wished to see Petronius.

Petronius ordered the slaves to carry him to the warm room into which he directed that his guest should be admitted. Vinitius was the son of his eldest sister, who had years before become the wife of Marcus Vinitius, a consul in the reign of Tiberius. Under Corbulo's command, the young Vinitius had been fighting the Parthians, and had now, after the close of the war, returned to Rome. Petronius was extremely fond of him, because, for one reason, he was handsome and athletic; and also because he had sufficient delicacy of feeling not to exceed a certain moderation in his debaucheries—a faculty which Petronius valued above all others.

"My greetings to Petronius," said the young man, as with an elastic step he entered the warm room. "May all the gods, and especially Aesculapius and Cypris, be indulgent to thee, for under their joint protection nothing can go amiss."

"Welcome to Rome, and may thy rest be sweet after the war," answered Petronius, extending his hand from the folds of the soft linen which covered him. "What news from Armenia? And while thou wert in Asia didst thou happen to go to Bithynia?"

For a period Petronius had himself been the governor of Bithynia, and had administered the province with firmness and justice. Inasmuch as this activity presented a curious contrast in the character of one noted for indolence and luxurious tastes, Petronius was fond of referring his services to the State, since they showed not only what he was able to do, but what he might have been, had he so wished.

"I did go to Heraclea," answered Vinitius. "I was sent there by Corbulo for reinforcements."

"Ah, Heraclea! There it was I knew a girl from Colchis for whom I would give all the divorced women I know—Poppaea included. But how long ago that was! Let us talk of other things: what news of the Parthians? Between ourselves, they bore me, the Volgeses, the Tiridates and Tigranes—all those barbarians who are in the habit of going on all fours at home, as Arulenus says, and who affect to be human beings only with us. Rome talks much of them, however, for the reason, probably, that she is afraid to talk anything else."

"This war fares badly, and but for Corbulo it might have ended in defeat."

"Corbulo? By Bacchus, a genuine war-god, a veritable Mars. A great general, and withal an irritable, blunt, thick-witted fellow. In spite of it all I like him—if for nothing else than because Nero fears him."

"Corbulo is no fool."

"Perhaps thou art right; but what difference does that make? As Pyrrho says, stupidity is no worse than intelligence, and cannot be told from it."

Vinitius continued to talk of the war, but when Petronius again closed his eyes, and the young man noticed his uncle's weary, drawn face, he changed the subject of conversation, and inquired with solicitude concerning his health.

Petronius once more raised his eyelids.

How was his health? So-so. He did not feel perfectly well. He did not feel so badly off, to be sure, as

young Sissena, whose sensibilities were so dulled that, in the morning, when he was taken to the bath, he would have to ask whether he was sitting or standing. No, he did not feel well. Vinitius commended him to Aesculapius and Cypris. But he, Petronius, did not believe in Aesculapius. It is not even known whose son that Aesculapius was, whether Arsinoë's or Coronis's; and when the mother is in dispute, what is there to say of the father? In these days who will guarantee his own father?

Petronius burst out laughing, and added:

"Two years ago I sent three dozen fat live cocks and a golden cup to Epidaurus. Canst thou imagine why? Said I to myself, whether it do good, or no good, it can do no harm. I am of the opinion that those who bring offerings to the gods, reason just as I do. All, with the possible exception of the mule drivers travellers hire at the gate of Capena. In addition to Aesculapius I accidentally had some business with some of his kind last year when my kidneys were out of order. They prescribed a night's sleep within the walls of a temple. I knew them for rogues, but even then I asked myself, what harm can come to me from that? Society rests on roguery, and life itself is self-deception. Even the soul is a dream. Nevertheless, one ought to have a certain degree of intelligence to be able to distinguish the errors that are pleasant from those that are not. I direct that my sweat room shall be heated with cedar wood sprinkled with ambergris, because while I am alive I prefer perfumes to stenches. As for Cypris, to whose good graces thou hast also commended me, I know enough about her protection to have introduced shooting pains in my right foot. But for all that she is a good goddess. I foresee the time, sooner or later, when thou also will be bringing white doves to her altar."

"Thou hast guessed right," answered Vinitius. "I came away scatheless from the arrows of the Parthians, but Love transfixed me, in a most unforeseen way, not a mile outside the city gate."

"By the white knees of the Graces, thou shalt tell me about this at length," said Petronius.

"I came to thee particularly for advice," answered Marcus.

The manicures who now began to busy themselves with Petronius interrupted him, and Marcus, at Petronius's invitation, doffed his tunic and plunged into the tepid bath.

"Bless me! I did not even ask thee if thy love is returned," said Petronius, as he gazed at Vinitius's youthful figure, which seemed as if chiselled from marble. "If Lissipus had only seen thee thou wouldst be gracing at this very moment the Palatine Gate as a statue of the young Hercules."

The young man smiled with satisfaction, as he plunged about in the bath, and sent the warm water in an infinitude of sparkling drops over the mosaic which represented Hera at that moment when the goddess begged that sleep might close the eyes of Zeus. Petronius stared at him with the delighted gaze of an artist.

When Vinitius came out of the bath and, in turn, had given himself into the hands of the manicures, the reader entered, carrying at his chest a bronze tube containing rolls of papyrus.

"Wouldst thou like to listen?" asked Petronius.

"If it is something of thine own—with pleasure," answered Vinitius. "Otherwise I would prefer to talk. Poets, now-a-days, button-hole one at every street corner."

"Right. It is impossible to get past any one of the basilicas, or baths, or libraries, or book shops, without running into a poet gesticulating like a monkey. When Agrippa came back from the East, he mistook them for lunatics. That is the way things go at present. Caesar is writing verses, therefore every one is imitating him. Only one thing is forbidden: To write better verses than Caesar's, and for that reason I fear somewhat for Lucan. As for me, I write prose with which, moreover, I neither regale myself nor others. The reader is about

to read the lines of the ill-fated Fabricius Veiento."

"Why ill-fated?"

"Because he has been commanded to amuse himself in the character of Odysseus and forbidden to return to his household gods till he received a fresh command. In one respect, however, this Odyssey will not be as hard as Ulysses's—his wife is not at all like Penelope. It is, I think, superfluous to explain to thee that the command was stupid. But in this place appearances are the only things that count. Fabricius wrote a wretched, tiresome book; but for all that every one is reading it with rapture, now that the author is exiled. From every quarter all one hears is, it is a scandal, a scandal. Possibly Fabricius has exaggerated a trifle, but I assure you, knowing our city and its heads of families and its women so well, that his account is paler than the reality. But that fact does not prevent his readers searching for allusions to themselves with terror, and to their friends with delight. At Avernus's bookstore there are a hundred clerks kept copying the book at dictation—it is an assured success."

"Did any of thy escapades get into it?"

"Of course. But the author fooled himself, because he did not see that I am at once much worse and less stupid than he has represented me. You see we have here long since lost the faculty of distinguishing what is moral from what is immoral. For my part, I am of the opinion that no distinction need be made, although Seneca, Musonius and Trasca pretend to see one. But for me it is a matter of indifference. By Hercules! I speak my mind openly. But I have persistently held to one point of superiority, which is that I do not confound what is ugly with what is beautiful. And this is, for instance, something our Bronzebeard, the poet, the driver, singer, dancer and historian does not understand."

"Nevertheless, I am sorry for Fabricius; he is a good companion."

"Conceit ruined him. Every one suspected him, yet no one was certain. He could not restrain himself, and gave the whole thing away in confidence."

"Didst thou hear the story about Ruffinus?"

"No."

"In that case let us go into the cool room. We will cool off there and I will tell thee the tale."

They entered the cooling room. In the centre a fountain arising from a pale rose-colored basin diffused the perfume of violets. Seating themselves in an alcove, covered with a silken fabric, they began to breathe in the coolness. For a few moments neither spoke. Vinitius dreamily gazed at the statue of a bronze faun who, as he inclined over a nymph's arm, tried eagerly to kiss her on the lips. After an interval he said:

"There is one who knows the truth. That certainly is the best that life has to give."

"Yes—to a degree. But that is not the only thing thou art fond of—thou likest war, for instance, to which I am not drawn, for the reason that in the camp one's finger nails break and lose their rosy tint. However, every one of us has his weakness. Bronzebeard likes singing—especially his own songs, and old Scaurus his Corinthian vase, which stands at the foot of his bed, and which he kisses when he cannot sleep. He has destroyed the lip of the vase with his kisses. I say, dost thou not write verses?"

"No, I have never been able to write even a single hexametre."

"And dost thou play the lute and sing?"

"No."

"And dost thou drive a chariot?"

"Once I competed in the hippodrome at Antioch, but unsuccessfully."

"In that case I will make my mind easy on thy account. Which faction didst thou belong to in the circus?"

"To the Green."

"Now I am perfectly satisfied, and the more so since, although thou art not as rich as Pallas or Seneca, thou art nevertheless well off. Dost thou see that, with us at present, while it is good if one can write verses, or sing to the lute, declaim, or compete in the circus, it is still

better, and immeasurably safer, for one not to write verses, nor to play, nor to sing, nor to compete in the circus. The most useful thing of all is to know how to be enthusiastic when Bronzebeard is enthusiastic. Thou art a handsome young fellow, therefore, the only thing that threatens thee is that Poppaea may fall in love with thee. But she has had too much experience. She learned quite enough of love with her first two husbands; with her third she has other plans. Knowest thou that fool of an Otho still loves her insanely. Far away upon the Spanish cliffs he walks and sighs. He has lost his former habits, and has become so fastidious about his person that it does not take him more than three hours a day to dress his hair. Who could think of such a thing —especially of Otho?"

"I understand him," answered Vinitius, "but in his place I should have acted otherwise."

"How exactly?"

"I should have formed faithful legions from the native mountaineers. The Iberians make excellent soldiers."

"Vinitius, Vinitius, I was almost ready to tell thee that thou wouldst have been incapable of such a thing. And dost thou know why? Because that, although such things are done, they are not even hinted at. For my part, in his place I should have laughed at Poppaea, laughed at Bronzebeard, and should have formed legions for my own use, not of Iberian men, but of Iberian women. But more particularly would I have written epigrams, which, unlike that unfortunate Ruffinus, I would have read to no one."

"By the way, thou wert going to tell me about him."

"I will do that in the anointing room."

But in the anointing room Vinitius's attention was diverted by the beauty of the slave women who awaited the bathers. Two of these, negresses who reminded one of ebony statues, began at once to anoint their bodies with Arabian perfumes; others, Phrygians, capable hair dressers, held in their hands, soft and flexible as serpents, polished mirrors of steel, and combs; while two others,

Grecian women from Cos, who were beautiful as goddesses, waited till the time should come to arrange the gentlemen's togas in graceful folds.

"By Zeus, the cloud scatterer," exclaimed Marcus Vinitius. "See what thou hast to choose from."

"I prefer quality to quantity," answered Petronius. "My whole household in Rome does not exceed four hundred, and I fancy that a larger number of servants is not required for personal attendance."

"More beautiful bodies, Bronzebeard himself does not own," said Vinitius, distending his nostrils.

Petronius answered with a suggestion of good-natured indifference: "Thou art my kinsman, and I am neither so yielding as Barsus, nor such a pedant as is Aulus Plautius."

At the sound of the last name Vinitius forgot the maidens from Cos, and, raising his head, asked: "What made thee think of Aulus Plautius? Can it be thou dost not know that when I dislocated my arm outside the city, I spent more than two weeks in his house? Plautius happened to be passing at the time of the accident, and when he saw how much I was suffering carried me to his house, where his slave, the physician Merien, cured me. I wished to talk with thee of precisely this thing."

"What is the trouble? Are my fears correct that thou art in love with Pomponia? If this be true, I am sorry for thee. She is not young and she is virtuous. There can be no worse combination. Brr."

"I did not fall in love with Pomponia—ehue," answered Vinitius.

"With whom then?"

"Would that I knew myself. But I do not even know her name, whether it be Lygia or Callina. In the house they call her Lygia, because she is a Lygian by descent, but she also has her barbarous name of Callina. What a wonderful house is Plautius's. It is filled with people, yet it is as quiet as the groves of Subiacum. In the course of the whole two weeks I was there I did not have a suspicion that there was a divinity not far off.

But once, at dawn, I caught sight of her bathing in the garden fountain. By the foam from which Venus rose, the morning light passed right through her body. It seemed to me that let the sun but rise, and she would vanish in its light, as the gleam of the morning stars. After this I saw her twice, and since then I have been unable to find rest, I know no other desires, I care for nothing that Rome can give me, I want no women, gold, nor Corinthian copper, I want not amber, pearls, nor wine, nor feasting. One thing alone I eagerly long for: Lygia. I confess to thee, Petronius, sincerely, that I am yearning for her, as one yearns for Paisythea, that dream pictured on the mosaic of thy warm room. Ceaselessly, day and night I yearn."

"If she is a slave, buy her."

"She is not a slave."

"Who, then, is she? One of Plautius's freed women?"

"Never having been a slave, she could not have been given her freedom."

"What, then, is she?"

"I do not know; a king's daughter, or something like it."

"Vinitius, thou art exciting my curiosity."

"If thou wilt listen to me, I will soon satisfy thy curiosity. It will not take long to tell the story. Doubtless thou knowest personally Vannius, the king of the Suevi, who, when he was banished from his own country, lived for many years in Rome, where he made himself a reputation for his luck at dice and his skill in chariot racing. The Emperor Drusus restored him again to his throne. Vannius, who was actually a man of parts, began by ruling well, and was successful in war, but later he gradually began to skin not only his neighbors, but his own Suevi. At this Vangio and Sido, his two nephews, the sons of Vibilius, king of the Hermunduri, determined to force him to go back to Rome—to try his luck at the dice."

"I remember, it did not happen so long ago—in the time of Claudius."

"Yes. War broke out. Vannius summoned to his aid

the Yazygi; his fond nephews turned to the Lygians, who, having heard of Vannius's wealth, and tempted by the hope of booty, poured in such multitudes that Claudius Caesar himself began to fear for the safety of his frontier. Claudius, not wishing to get involved in a foreign war, wrote to Atelius Hister, the commander of the Danubian legions, to follow closely the course of the war, and not to permit it to disturb our peace. Then Hister exacted of the Lygians that they should bind themselves not to cross the frontier. Not only did they agree to this, but gave hostages, among whom were the wife and daughter of their leader. Thou knowest that the barbarians take their wives and children with them in the field. My Lygia is the daughter of this leader."

"Where didst thou learn all this?"

"Aulus Plautius himself told me. As a matter of fact, the Lygians did not cross the frontier, but barbarians come like a hurricane, and disappear with the same impetuosity. Just so vanished the Lygians with their wild bull horns on their heads. They, the Suevi and the Yazygi, Vannius had assembled, but their king was killed. In consequence they disappeared with their booty, and left their hostages in Hister's power. The mother died after a short time, and the daughter was sent by Hister to the ruler of all Germany, Pomponius, for the reason that he did not know what else to do with her. At the conclusion of the war with Catti he returned to Rome where, as you know, Claudius allowed him to hold a triumph. At that time the girl walked behind the conqueror's chariot, but when in his turn Pomponius became perplexed to know what to do with the girl, since a hostage might not be regarded as a captive, he gave her to his sister, Pomponia Graecina, the wife of Plautius. Here in this house, where everything from the host to the chickens in the yard are virtuous, she grew to maidenhood—alas, virtuous as Graecina herself, and to be so beautiful that in comparison to her even Poppaea seems like an autumn fig to an apple of the Hesperides."

"And what then?"

"I repeat, that from the instant I saw how the rays of light shone through and penetrated her body, I fell desperately in love with her."

"Consequently she is transparent, like a sea lamprey or a young sardine?"

"Do not laugh, Petronius. But if thou hast been led into a misunderstanding by my speaking so freely of my passion, remember that bright clothes often cover deep wounds. I must confess to thee that when I was returning from Asia, I slept a night in the temple of Mopsus in the hope that a revelation might come to me in my slumber. And indeed while I slept Mopsus himself appeared to me, and declared that love would work a great change in my life."

"I have heard that Pliny says he does not believe in the gods, but does believe in dreams—and perhaps he is right. My jesting does not prevent my thinking at times, that there exists only one divinity—eternal, omnipotent, and creative—Venus Genitrix. It unites souls, and bodies, everything. Love it was who called the world from chaos. Whether he did well is another question, but since it is so, we must of necessity acknowledge his might, although one need not be thankful for it."

"Ah, Petronius, it is easier to talk philosophy than to give good counsel."

"Tell me what is it thou particularly wishest?"

"I wish to have Lygia. I wish that these hands of mine which now only embrace the air, might hold her and press her in their embrace. I wish to breathe her breath. If she were a slave, I would give Aulus for her a hundred maidens, with feet whiter than chalk, as sign that they had been for the first time exposed for sale. I wish to have her in my house till my head is as white as the summit of Soracte in winter."

"Though she is not a slave, yet because she belongs to Plautius's family, and because she has been forsaken by her parents, she may be regarded as a foster-daughter.

Had he wished, Plautius might have given her to thee."

"Clearly thou knowest not Pomponia Graecina. Both are bound up in her as in their own daughter."

"Indeed, I know Pomponia—a veritable cypress tree. Were she not the wife of Aulus, she might have been hired as a professional mourner. Ever since Julia's death, she has not doffed her mourning; in a word, she looks as if, while still living, she were wandering over the asphodel-strewn meadow. Moreover, she is a woman who has had only a single husband—which makes her a phoenix among our much-divorced women. By the way, didst thou hear that a phoenix has actually appeared in Upper Egypt? The thing happens not oftener than once in five hundred years."

"Petronius! Petronius! We will talk of the phoenix some other time."

"Then hearken to me, dear Marcus. I know Aulus Plautius, who, although he disapproves of my manner of life, yet regards me with a certain attachment; and, perhaps, rates me above others, for he knows that I have never been an informer, as for instance, were Domitius Afer, Tigellinus, and the whole gang of Bronzebeard's * friends. While making no pretensions of being a stoic, I have more than once turned away in disgust from certain acts of Nero's on which Seneca and Burrus have looked with indulgence. If thou thinkest I can do something for thee with Aulus—I am thy servant."

"It seems to me, thou canst. Thou knowest how to influence him, and thy resources are inexhaustible. Think over the case, and speak with Plautius."

"Thou exaggeratest both my influence and my resourcefulness. However, if that is all thou wantest of me, I will speak to Plautius when he returns to Rome."

"He returned two days since."

"That being the case, let us go into the dining room,

*Nero's name was originally L. Domitius Ahenobarbus. As Ahenobarbus means Bronzebeard, the name clung to him as an appropriate sobriquet.

where our breakfast is waiting, and when we have pulled ourselves together, we will have them take us to Plautius's."

"Thou hast always been good to me," exclaimed Vinitius with fervor, "but now there is nothing left for me but to set up thy statue among my lares—a fine one, like that over there—and make offerings to it."

He turned to the statues which adorned one of the walls of the perfumed chamber, and designated the one which represented Petronius as Hermes, with a staff in his hand.

"By the light of Helios," he added, "if the god-like Alexander was like to thee, I marvel not at Helena."

This exclamation in an equal degree breathed sincerity and flattery, for although Petronius was older, and physically not so well developed as Vinitius, his face seemed handsomer. The Roman women not only went into ecstasies over the delicacy of his mind and taste, for which reason they called him the arbiter of elegance, but also over his figure. This was reflected even on the faces of the two maidens of Cos, who were at present engaged in arranging the folds in his toga. One of them, Eunice by name, who cherished a secret passion for Petronius, gazed in his eyes with tenderness and adoration.

But he, without even looking at her, smiled at Vinitius and began to quote to him by way of reply Seneca's epigram about women: "Animal impudens, etc."

When he had finished, Petronius, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, led him into the dining room.

In the anointing room, the two Greek girls, the Phrygians and the two negresses were making ready to gather together the perfumes. But on the instant, from behind the drawn curtains of the cold room, protruded the heads of the bathing masters, and a cautious call was heard. One of the Grecians, the Phyrgians, and both of the negresses immediately disappeared behind the curtain.

The time of mirth and revelry had come in the baths. The superintendent did not restrain the slaves, because he himself had not infrequently taken part in similar orgies.

Petronius, moreover, also had his doubts about them, but being an indulgent man and one not fond of criticising, looked upon the revels through his fingers.

Eunice remained alone in the anointing room. She listened for a time to the sound of the voices and laughter retreating towards the sweat room; then she took the bench ornamented with amber and ivory, on which Petronius had just been sitting, and carefully moved it over to his statue.

The anointing room was filled with sunlight, and the bright reflection of the many-colored marble slabs with which the walls were covered.

Eunice mounted the bench. When she found herself on a level with the statue, she threw her arms impetuously around its neck; then, throwing back her golden hair and pressing her rosy body against the white marble, she ardently covered with kisses Petronius's cold mouth.

CHAPTER II

After breakfast, as Petronius called it, in spite of the fact that the friends sat down at table when simple mortals had long since finished their noonday meal, Petronius proposed a short nap. It was still much too early for visiting, he thought. There are, to be sure, persons who begin to visit their friends at sunrise, holding that the custom is sanctioned by antiquity and is truly Roman. But he, Petronius, considered it barbarous. The best of all times for visiting is after noon, but not earlier than when the sun sinks towards the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, and begins to throw oblique shadows on the Forum. It is usually still very warm in the autumn, and people are fond of sleeping after eating. At this time it is pleasant to listen to the murmuring of the fountain in the great hall, and when one has taken the thousand obligatory steps, to muse in the pur-

plish light sifted through the purple of the half-drawn awning.

Vinitius agreed with him. They walked up and down, talking in an off-hand way of the gossip from the palace on the Palatine, and the city; and carelessly reasoning of life. After a time Petronius retired into the sleeping room, but did not sleep long. At the end of a half hour he returned, and when he had ordered verbena to be brought him, began to smell it and to rub it on his hands and temples.

"Thou canst imagine," said he, "how stimulating and refreshing this is. Now I am ready."

The litters had already been waiting long. They took their seats and directed that they should be borne to the Patrician Quarter, to the house of Aulus. Petronius's villa was situated on the southern slope of the Palatine hill near what is called the Carinae. The shortest way thither lay through the Forum. However, as Petronius wished to visit Master Idomeneus's jewelry shop, he directed that they should carry them through the Apollinis Quarter and the Forum in the direction of Sceleratus Quarter, on the corner of which there were all sorts of booths.

The stalwart negroes raised the litters and started on the way, preceded by slaves, called runners. For a certain time Petronius was silent; he kept raising his verbena-perfumed palms to his nostrils, and was evidently thinking of something. Afterwards he said:

"It occurs to me that if thy forest nymph be not a slave nothing prevents her from leaving Plautius's house, and taking up her abode with thee. Thou wouldst surround her with love, and shower riches upon her, as I do upon my divine Chrysothemis, with whom, between ourselves, I am satisfied—at least, as well pleased as she is with me."

Marcus shook his head disapprovingly.

"Why not?" asked Petronius. "If worst came to worst, the case would go to Caesar, and thou mayest be certain that, irrespective of my influence, our Bronzebeard would take thy side."

"Thou dost not know Lygia," answered Vinitius.

"In that case permit me to ask, if thou thyself knowest more of her than her appearance? Hast thou talked with her? Hast thou told her thy love?"

"I saw her first at the fountain, and afterwards I met her twice. Do not forget that while I was in Aulus's house, I lived in an extension intended for guests—and that with my dislocated hand I was not able to be present at the family table. Only on the eve of the day I announced my departure did I find myself with Lygia at supper, but I did not succeed in exchanging even a word with her. I was forced to listen while Aulus told stories of his victories in Britain, and after that to a discussion of the failure of the small estates in Italy, to prevent which Licinius Stolo was still striving. In fact I do not know whether Aulus is capable of talking of anything else; and do not fancy that we shall be able to escape it, unless thou preferest to hear about the effeminacy of the times. They raise pheasants in their bird house, but do not eat them, being convinced that with every pheasant eaten the downfall of the Roman power is brought nearer. The second time I met her by the cistern in the garden. She had a reed in her hand, the end of which she was dipping in the water and sprinkling with it the iris growing about. Look at my knees! By Hercules's shield! they did not shake when the Parthian rushed with howls upon our ranks—but at the cistern they quaked. And, embarrassed as a boy who still wears an amulet on his neck, my eyes alone prayed for indulgence, as for a long while I was not able to utter a word."

Petronius gazed at him with an expression almost of envy: "Fortunate fellow!" said he, "no matter how bad the world or life may be, there is one thing that remains eternally beautiful—youth."

Then he asked:

"So thou didst not speak to her?"

"Oh, no! When I had got myself a little under control I said I was on my way back from Asia, that I had sprained my hand outside the city gates, but now that the

time had come when I must leave this hospitable roof, I was persuaded that to suffer under it was more delightful than to divert oneself elsewhere, and to be ill there more consoling than to be in health away from it. She followed my words, herself confused, her head bent down, marking something the while with the reed on the yellow sand. Then she raised her eyes, looked again at the lines she had drawn, as if preparing herself to ask me something—and then suddenly ran away, like a dryad from a stupid faun."

"She must have beautiful eyes."

" Like the sea, and I was drowned in them exactly as if in the sea. Believe me, the Archipelago is not so blue as her eyes. In a moment Plautius's little boy ran up and asked me something, but I did not understand what he wanted."

"O Minerva!" exclaimed Petronius, "take from this youth's eyes the bandage with which Eros has bound them—lest he dash his head on the columns of the temple of Venus."

Then he turned to Vinitius:

"Listen, thou spring bud on the tree of life, thou first green shoot of the vineyard. Better than take thee to the house of Plautius let me order them to carry thee to the house of Gelotius, where there is a school for young men who know nothing of life."

"I don't understand thee."

"But what did she write on the sand? Was it the name of Love, or, perchance, a heart transfixed with his arrow, or something of that sort by which thou mightest learn that the satyrs had already whispered the secrets of life in the nymph's ear? Is it possible thou didst not examine the marks?"

"From the time when I put on the toga more time has passed than thou thinkest," answered Vinitius. "Before little Aulus ran up I carefully examined the marks, for well I know that the girls of Greece and Rome frequently write on the sand things which their lips know

not how to speak. However, guess, guess what she had drawn?"

"If it was not what I have supposed, I will not guess."

"A fish."

"A what?"

"I say—a fish. Does not that signify that cold blood still runs in her veins? I do not know. But thou, who hast named me a spring-time bud on the tree of life, dost not thou, in truth, know better than I how to interpret this sign?"

"Beloved! Ask Pliny about that. He knows everything about fish. Old Apicius, if he were still alive, might perchance also be able to tell you something about it. Not for nothing did he during his life eat more fish than could be gathered together in the Bay of Naples."

The conversation was interrupted by the litters arriving in a crowded street, where the noise of the multitude prevented further talk. Passing the Apollinis Quarter they turned to the Boarium, and thence to the Roman Forum. The Forum in fair days, before sunset, was filled with loiterers, who assembled in multitudes to saunter among the columns, to tell stories, to learn the news, to stare at the litters borne past with their distinguished occupants, to rub shoulders in the jewellers' shops, in the book stalls, in the money changers', in the shops where were sold silk, bronze, and every possible sort of thing. The houses occupying a part of the market extending towards the Capitol were filled with these shops. Half of the Forum, immediately under the cliffs of the Capitol was already plunged in darkness, while the columns which adorned the temples above were drowned in a splendor of gold and blue. The columns standing on a lower level cast their long shadows on the marble slabs. So great indeed were the number of columns standing about everywhere that the eye lost itself among them as in a forest. These buildings and columns seemed to have jammed themselves together. They were piled one on the other, they ran right and left, they ascended

the hills, took refuge on the walls of the Capitol, or clung one to the other like trees, large and small, thick and thin, golden or white—now blooming under the architrave with acanthus blossoms, now ornamented with Ionic spirals, now capped with a simple Doric square. On the forest glistened colored triglyphs; out of tympans stepped the sculptured figures of gods, winged golden four-horse chariots struggled as it were to fly from their pediments into the air—into the imperturbable blue which overspread this city of crowded temples. Through the middle and along the edges of the market surged the populace. The throng as it wandered under the arches of the basilica of Julius Caesar, or sat in the steps of the temple of Castor and Pollux, or sauntered about the little temple of Vesta, resembled as it moved against this extensive marble background, a variegated swarm of butterflies or beetles. Above, along the enormous ressaut on the side of the temple dedicated to *Jovi Optimo, Maximo,* new waves began to surge; the Romans were listening to the orator on the platform in the Rostrum square; here and there the calls of the pedlers were heard, as they sold fruit, wine, or water mixed with the juice of figs; the invitations of the fakers praising wonder-working nostrums; of diviners seeking out treasure, of the interpreters of dreams. Somewhere above the noise of the conversation and the hawkers' cries were to be distinguished the sound of the sistrum, the Egyptian sambuca, or of Grecian flutes; in other places the sick, the pious and the afflicted were bringing offerings to the temples. Among the people flocks of doves flew down on the marble pavement, and threw themselves eagerly on the proffered grain; like variegated or dusky spots in motion these flocks now rose in the air, with a loud flutter of wings, now again alighted in a place vacated by the crowd. From time to time the people stood aside to make way for the litters in which were to be seen the painted faces of women, or the heads of senators or patricians with features as it were congested and enfeebled by existence. The multitude, composed of

members of many different tribes, called to them by name, adding a nickname, a bit of ridicule or praise. Into the disordered groups at times companies of soldiers or guards, enforcing order in the streets, forced their way, proceeding with measured tread. On all sides Greek was heard quite as frequently as Latin.

Vinitius, who had not been in the city for a long time, gazed with a certain curiosity on the human ant-hill, and on the famous Roman Forum, lording it over this multitude hailing from the four corners of the earth, and at the same time submerged in it. Petronius, divining his companions's thought, called the Forum "The nest of Knights without the Knights." Indeed, the real Romans were completely lost in that throng, composed of the representatives of every race and nationality. In it there appeared for an instant inhabitants of Ethiopia, enormous, light-haired denizens of the far North, Britons, Gauls, and Germans, squint-eyed immigrants from Seres, people from the Euphrates, and from India, with brick-stained beards; Syrians from the banks of the Orontes, with black insinuating eyes, dried out like bones; nomads from the Arabian deserts; Jews with sunken breasts, Egyptians with changeless, different smiles on their faces, Numidians and Africans; Greeks from Hellas, who governed the city on an equality with the Romans, but held sway through science, art, wisdom, and knavery; Greeks from the Islands, from Asia-Minor, Egypt, Italy, and Narbonic Gaul. Among the throng of slaves with pierced ears, were not a few freedmen, idle people whom Caesar amused, clothed and even fed at his own expense; not a few voluntary immigrants had flocked here, attracted to the huge city by the possibility of living without labor, and by expectations of success, and usurers, and priests of Serapis with palm branches in their hands, priests of Isis to whose altars were brought more offerings than to the temple of the Capitoline Jupiter, and priests of Cybele carrying in their hands the golden fruit of the maize, and priests of wandering divinities, Eastern dancers in shining mitres, venders of amulettes, snake-

charmers and Chaldean soothsayers, and finally a considerable number of vagrants without any occupation, who weekly turned to the store-house on the other side of the Tiber for bread, who fought for lottery tickets in the circus, spent their nights in chronically ramshackle houses on the quarter beyond the river, and sunny warm days under porticos, in the filthy taverns of the Suburra, on the Milvian bridge, or before the villas of the distinguished Romans, whence, from time to time, the leavings from the slaves' table were thrown to them.

Petronius knew the throng well. From every quarter the cry: "It is he," reached Vinitius's ear. Petronius was beloved for his liberality; but still more had his popularity increased after the Romans learned that he had appealed to Caesar for an annulment of the sentence of death pronounced against all the slaves of the prefect Pedanius Secundus, without distinction of age or sex, because one of their number, driven to desperation, had killed the tyrant. Petronius had, to be sure, stated in public that the case concerned him personally not at all, and that he had gone before the Emperor in his private capacity, as the arbiter of elegance, because, while a barbarous slaughter of the kind was worthy of the Scythians, it was not of Romans, and offended his aesthetic sensibilities. Nevertheless, the multitude, outraged at the punishment, adored Petronius from that time.

But he did not care for this popularity. Petronius did not forget that Britannicus, whom Nero poisoned, was also beloved of the mob, as well as Agrippina, assassinated at Caesar's command, and Octavia, who, after her veins had been opened, had been suffocated in a warm bath on the Panditaria, and Rubellius Plautus, who had been banished, and Thrasea, who lived in daily expectation of a sentence of death. The disposition of the populace were consequently better counted an ill-omen, and, skeptic that he was, Petronius was superstitious. His detestation of the multitude was twofold: he detested it as an aristocrat, and as a man of culture. In his opinion those who smelt

of dry beans carried in their shirts, who were always hoarse and sweating from playing "mora" on the street crossing, and in the peristyles, did not deserve to be called human beings. For this reason, Petronius, giving no heed to the applause and the kisses wafted to him, told Marcus the story of the killing of Pedanius, and he ridiculed the fickleness of the street shouters who applauded Nero as he was going to the temple of Jupiter Stator the very day after they had expressed their indignation at his tyranny. At Avernus' book shop he ordered the litter to halt, and descending bought an illuminated manuscript, which he gave to Vinitius.

"Here is a gift for thee," he said.

"Thanks," answered Vinitius.

When he had examined the title he asked:

"The Satiricon? Is it something new? Whom is it by?"

"It is mine. But I am not minded to follow in Ruffinus's tracks, whose story I was about to tell thee; nor in the tracks of Fabricius Veiento, therefore no one knows of this. Tell no one of it."

"But thou hast said thou dost not write verses," said Vinitius looking over the manuscript, "and here I observe prose and verse side by side."

"When you read it pay attention to the description of the feast of Trimalchion. As for verses, they disgust me since Nero began to write them. When Vitelius wants to ease his stomach he uses little ivory sticks which he thrusts down his throat; others for the same purpose use flamingo feathers steeped either in olive oil or in a decoction of some sort of grass possessing the same properties; but my unique remedy is to read Nero's verses. Afterwards I can praise them, if not with a clear conscience, at least with a clean stomach."

Having said this he again stopped the litter at the jeweler Idomeneus, and when he had arranged the question about the precious stones, directed that they proceed straight to Aulus's house.

"On the way," said he, "I will tell thee the story of Ruffinus as an instance of that to which self-conceit may bring an author."

But before he began his story the litters turned into the Patrician Quarter, and they found themselves before Aulus's dwelling. A young and muscular gate-keeper opened before them the door leading to the main entrance, over which a caged magpie received the guests with a piercing greeting of "Welcome!"

On their way from the second vestibule to the court, Vinitius asked:

"Didst thou notice that the doorkeeper here goes unchained?"

"'Tis a strange house," answered Petronius in an undertone. "Thou probably knowest that Pomponia Graecina has been suspected of belonging to a superstitious sect of the East, that worships a person called Christus. It appears that Crispinilla, who cannot forgive Pomponia for being satisfied during her life with a single husband, performed the kindness. A woman with a single husband! At present in Rome it is easier to find a plate of Noricum mushrooms. She was tried before a domestic court."

"Thou art right, it is truly a strange house. Afterwards I will tell thee what I have seen and heard while in it."

They entered the great hall. The slave standing at the entrance sent the butler to announce the visitors. Meanwhile, servants presented them with chairs and placed stools under their feet. Petronius, who had never been in the house, imagined that in it there reigned an eternal gloom; he consequently looked about him with surprise, and even with a feeling of disappointment, as he observed that the court produced on the contrary a pleasing impression. From above, through a large opening, fell a sheaf of bright light, which broke into a thousand sparks in the fountain. A four-sided basin with a jet of water in the centre, designed to catch the rain in bad weather, was surrounded by anemones and lilies.

It was evident that the persons in the house loved lilies; they grew in thick clumps of white and red blossoms; there were also many sapphire-colored irises whose tender leaves were silvered by the spray. Among the moist moss, which concealed the lily pots, and the dense overgrowth of verdure, were descried bronze statues of children and sea birds. In one corner a bronze roe inclined her greenish head, turned gray by the moisture, to the water as if wishing to drink. The floor of the court was ornamented with mosaic. The walls, part faced with reddish marble, and in part decorated with paintings representing trees, fishes, birds and griffins, caressed the eye with their play of color. The casing of the doors leading into the side chambers were ornamented with tortoise shell and ivory. Beside the doors against the walls stood the statues of Aulus's forefathers. Everything evidenced a peaceful plenty, far removed from luxury, but full of dignity.

Petronius, who lived in a style immeasurably more luxurious, could not find a single thing that offended his taste. He was about to point this out to Vinitius when the doorkeeper suddenly pulled aside the curtain separating the hall from the terrace and Aulus Plautius appeared in the distance rapidly approaching.

He was a man declining toward the evening of life, with grizzled, yet vivacious, head, and an energetic face, a trifle short, but suggesting, in spite of that, the head of an eagle. For the time being his face wore an expression of surprise; the unexpected visit of Nero's friend, companion, and confidant alarmed him somewhat.

Petronius was a man too observant and worldly not to notice this. Therefore, after the first greetings he declared with all the eloquence and amiability he could summon, that he came to express his gratitude for the hospitality shown in this house to his sister's son; that gratitude alone had prompted the visit, and that his long acquaintance with Aulus had inspired him with this audacity.

Aulus in return assured him that he was welcome. As

for the gratitude, he, Aulus, considered himself in his debt, as although Petronius of a truth would not guess what service he had rendered him.

In fact Petronius did not guess. To no purpose did he raise his nut-brown eyes, did he strain his mind in an effort to recall the slightest service he had shown Aulus, or any one else. He could remember none—except that it might be the one which he was about to render Vinitius. Perhaps something of the kind had happened in spite of himself and without his knowing it.

"I love and admire Vespasian, and you saved his life when he was unfortunate enough to fall asleep during one of Caesar's recitals."

"He slept to his own good fortune," replied Petronius, "in that he did not hear the verses. I will not deny, however, that this blessing might not have turned out unfortunately. Bronzebeard was for dispatching a centurion to him at once to advise him in a friendly way to open his veins."

"And thou, Petronius, laughed him out of it."

"Yes, or to be more truthful, I did the contrary. I told him that Orpheus knew how to lull the wild beasts to slumber—consequently his triumph would have been still more complete if he had succeeded in putting Vespasian to sleep. It is possible to reprove Ahenobarbus, provided that to a modicum of reproof there be added a large amount of flattery. Her Imperial Highness, Poppaea, understands this very well."

"Alas, such is the way of the times," observed Aulus. "Two of my front teeth are missing—knocked out by a stone thrown by a British slinger—on this account I whistle when I speak. Nevertheless I consider the days spent by me in Britain the happiest of my life."

"Because they were victorious," Vinitius hastened to add.

But Petronius, fearing that the veteran might begin his long tales of the wars, changed the topic of conversation. "In the environs of Praeneste the inhabitants have found a dead wolf cub with two heads, and three

days ago, during the storm, the lightning knocked off a corner of the temple of Luna—an unusual phenomenon so late in the fall. One Cotta, who told me this, went on to say that the priests of the temple of Luna regard this as a sign of the fall of a city, or at least the ruin of a great house, which ruin may only be prevented by extraordinary sacrificial offerings."

Aulus, when he had heard what Petronius said, remarked that portents of that kind ought not to be disregarded. No wonder that the gods have been angered by the incalculable evils; and in such cases one must offer propitiatory sacrifices.

To this Petronius objected:

"Thy house, Plautius, is not particularly great, although many live in it; and my house, although, indeed, much too large for so unworthy an owner, is in itself, also, not large. But if ruin threatens as great a house, as, for instance, the Domus Transitoria, is it not worth our while to make offerings to save it?"

Plautius made no answer to this question. And his silence offended Petronius because, although he had lost the capacity of distinguishing good from evil, he had never been a spy—and it was possible to speak to him without fear. Therefore he again changed the conversation, and started to praise Plautius's house and the excellent taste displayed in all the details.

"'Tis an old homestead," answered Plautius. "I have altered nothing in it since I inherited it."

The curtain separating the hall from the covered terrace was thrown aside and the house was open to view through its entire extent, so that looking through the terrace and the peristyle and hall behind it, the gaze reached to the garden itself, which, as seen from a distance, looked like a brilliant picture in a dark frame. From the garden the sound of happy children's voices were brought to the court.

"Ah, commander," cried Petronius, "allow us to enjoy at shorter range this genuine laughter, which now-a-days it is given to one to hear but rarely."

"Willingly," answered Plautius, rising from his chair. "That is my little Aulus and Lygia playing ball. As for the laughter, I suppose, Petronius, that thou spendest thy whole life in pleasure."

"Life deserves to be laughed at, therefore I laugh at it," replied Petronius. "That laughter, however, sounds different."

"As for that," added Vinitius, "Petronius does not laugh during the day, rather he laughs all night."

Talking thus, they passed through the whole extent of the house and found themselves in the garden, where Lygia and little Aulus were playing ball. Slaves, called spheristae, who were especially appointed for this game, picked the balls up from the ground and handed them to the players. Petronius cast a passing glance at Lygia. Little Aulus, seeing Vinitius, ran up to ask after his health. The young man inclined his head as he passed the girl, who stood with a ball in her hand, her hair slightly disordered and somewhat out of breath and flushed.

In the garden dining room, upon which the ivy, vine and honeysuckle threw their shade, sat Pomponia Graecina. The visitors hastened to greet her. Petronius, although he had never visited Aulus's house, knew her, as he had met her at Antistia's, the daughter of Rubelius Plautus, and also in the houses of Seneca and Polion. He could not conceal a certain surprise which her sad, but agreeable face, the nobility of her bearing, her movements and speech, inspired in him. To such a degree did Pomponia contradict his ideas of women that, even this man, corrupt to the marrow, self-confident as no one else in Rome—this man not only felt a certain admiration for her, but even lost, when at times he was in her presence, his self-confidence. And now, as he was thanking her for her care of Vinitius he involuntarily addressed her as "Lady"—a title which never came to his mind when conversing with Calvia Crispinilla, Scribonia, Valeria, Solona, or with other women of the great world.

When he had greeted her and expressed his gratitude, Petronius fell to complaining that Pomponia so seldom left her home; that she was not to be seen either in the circus or in the amphitheatre.

Laying her hand on her husband's she answered him calmly.

"We are both growing old, and are beginning to appreciate the quiet of our home."

Petronius was about to reply, when Plautius added in his whistling voice:

"And we feel ourselves becoming more and more strangers among people who call even our Roman gods by Greek names."

"For some time past the gods have been converted into mere figures of speech," replied Petronius lightly. "So, since the Greeks have taught us rhetoric it is easier for me to say, for instance, Hera than Juno."

When he said this he turned his gaze toward Pomponia, as if to explain, that in her presence he could think of no other divinity; then he started to complain of what she had said of old age. To be sure people grow old quickly—but not those who lead her kind of life. Besides there are faces of which Saturn seems to remember nothing. Petronius spoke with a certain degree of sincerity, for Pomponia Graecina, although she had already passed the meridian, nevertheless retained a fair freshness of face; and as she possessed a small head and delicate features, presented at times, in spite of her sombre dress, her sedateness and pensiveness, the impression of a quite young woman.

In the interval, little Aulus, who had become extraordinarily friendly with Vinitius while he was in the house, came up to the young patrician to invite him to play ball. Lygia herself followed the boy into the dining room. Under the ivy shade, with the light sparkling and trembling on her face, she seemed to Petronius to be much more beautiful than he had first seen her, and, in very fact, nymph-like. Still, without exchanging a word with

her, he rose, and, bowing, began to quote in place of the customary greeting, the words in which Odysseus saluted Nausicaa:

"If thou art one of the gods, queen of the broad heaven, then only from Artemis, the great daughter of Zeus, can come the beauty of that face, and the dignity of that stature. If thou art born of mortals, if thou art under the power of the destiny of the living, then blessed beyond words thy father and thy mother, and blessed be thy brothers."

Even Pomponia was delighted with the exquisite courtesy of this man of the world. Lygia listened in embarrassment. Her face flushed. She dared not lift her eyes. But little by little a mischievous smile began to play about the corners of her mouth and her face reflected the struggle going on within between maiden modesty and a desire to answer. The latter evidently won, for, looking suddenly up at Petronius, she answered him in the very words of Nausicaa. She spoke without taking breath, and in a tone of voice suggestive of the class room:

"Stranger, thou art neither wicked nor dull."

Then turning quickly she ran away like a frightened bird.

Now came his turn to be surprised. He had not expected to hear Homer's verses from the lips of a girl who, according to Vinitius, was of barbarian birth. He glanced in perplexity at Pomponia, but she could not give any explanation, for she herself smilingly observed only the pride with which the elder Aulus's face was illuminated.

He could not hide his satisfaction. In the first place, he loved Lygia as his own daughter; in the second, despite his old Roman prejudices, which compelled him to decry the new fashion of using the Grecian language, he none the less counted a knowledge of it a crown of social culture. He himself had never been able to learn Greek well, and was secretly distressed at it. Therefore he was glad that this grand gentleman and writer, who was

prepared to consider his house as little more than barbarian, had been answered in the language and verses of Homer.

"We have a teacher—a Greek," said Plautius, turning to Petronius. "He instructs our little one, and the girl overhears the lessons. She is a mere chit, but a worthy one, and my wife and I have become very fond of her."

Petronius looked through the green of the ivy and the honeysuckle at the young people playing ball. Having laid off his toga, retaining only his single tunic, Vinitius was throwing a ball which Lygia caught as she stood opposite with uplifted hands. At first she had not impressed Petronius, to whom she appeared scrawny. But in the dining-room she impressed him quite differently. She would, he thought, make a good model for Aurora, and, as an expert, he discerned that she possessed some peculiar latent charm.

He observed her in detail, and appraised everything on its merits: the rosy transparent face, the fresh mouth, created, as it were, for kissing, the eyes blue as the azure sea, and the alabaster whiteness of her forehead, and the sumptuousness of her dark hair, with its coils giving forth a reflection of amber or Corinthian copper, and the delicate neck, and the "divine" roundness of her shoulders, and the litheness, the pose of her whole body which breathed the youth of May and of budding flowers. In him spoke the artist and devotee of beauty who felt that under the statue of this maiden might be written the word "Spring." Suddenly he remembered Chrysothemis, and Petronius was ready to laugh with disgust. She seemed to him strangely faded, with her hair besprinkled with golden powder, with her blackened eyebrows, like a withered, falling rose. But still all Rome envied him his connection with Chrysothemis. Then he compared Poppaea to Lygia, and likewise this renowned beauty seemed to him soulless as a waxen mask. In this girl with her Tanagrian features, there inhered not only Spring, but the effulgent spirit of life which radiated through her rosy form, as light from a lamp.

"Vinitius is right," he reflected, "and my Chrysothemis is old, old—old as Troy."

Then turning to Pomponia Graecina and pointing to the garden he said:

"I now understand, Lady, that with two such beings, home seems dearer than the circus, and the feasts in the palace on the Palatine."

"Yes," answered she, looking aside at little Aulus and Lygia.

The old commander began to tell the girl's history, and what he had heard many years ago from Atelius Hister about the Lygian tribe that lived in the dark north.

The young people having finished their game of ball had been for some time walking along the sandy paths of the garden. Against the background of myrtle and cypresses they seemed like three white statues. Lygia held little Aulus by the hand. When they had strolled for a short time they sat down on a bench beside the fish pond situated in the centre of the garden. Little Aulus almost immediately ran away to frighten the fish in the transparent water, and Vinitius resumed the conversation, begun while they were walking.

"Yes," said he, in a low hesitating voice, "scarcely had I thrown aside the robe which the children of free-born citizens wear till they are seventeen, than they sent me to the legions in Asia. I had no knowledge of Rome, of life, or of love. I had learned by heart a few verses of Anacreon and Horace, but could not, like Petronius, quote verses when the mind is mute with ecstasy and cannot express itself in its own words. When I was a boy I was sent to the school of Musonius, who used to tell us that happiness consists in desiring what the gods wish—and depends consequently upon our will. But I think that there is another more sublime and sweeter happiness which does not depend on our will, which love alone can give. The gods themselves are striving to obtain it. Therefore, I who have not yet put love to the test, follow their example, Lygia, and I, also, seek that one who would desire to give me bliss."

He paused. For a time nothing was heard save the gentle splashing of the water into which little Aulus was throwing stones to frighten the fish. Soon Vinitius again spoke, in a softer and lower voice:

"Thou hast probably heard of Titus, the son of Vespasian? It is related of him that when little more than a boy, he fell so deeply in love with Veronica, that grief almost brought him to the grave. I am capable of such love, Lygia. Wealth, glory, power—all are smoke, vanity. A rich man can find another still richer; the famous man is cast in the shadow by the greater glory of another; the mighty may be conquered by one more mighty. But can Caesar, himself, or one of the gods, seek to know greater delight, can he feel happier than a mere mortal when at his breast a beloved breast is breathing, when he kisses beloved lips. Consequently love makes us equal with the gods, Lygia."

She listened, disturbed, astonished, and yet as if she were hearkening to the sounds of a Grecian flute or a lyre. At certain moments it seemed to her that Vinitius was singing a marvellous song, which poured itself into her ear, set her blood surging, strove to freeze her heart, frightened yet filled with an uncomprehended joy. But in addition it seemed to her that he spoke of something which was already latent in her, but something which she could not explain. She felt that he was arousing in her something which had been sleeping in her heart, and that from that instant, confused dreams began to dispose themselves in a form which was becoming more definite, more fascinating, more beautiful.

Meanwhile the sun had long passed the Tiber and stood low over the Janiculum hill. A purple light illuminated the motionless cypresses, as if permeating the whole air. Lygia raised her light blue eyes—eyes that seemed just to have been awakened from sleep to Vinitius, and all at once, in the glow of the sunset he bent over her with an entreaty trembling in his gaze, and appeared to her more beautiful than any human being, or any of the gods of Greece or Rome whose statues she had seen on the pedi-

ment of the temple. He gently seized her arm, above the elbow, and asked:

"Canst thou not guess, Lygia, why I tell thee this?"

"No," she whispered, so low that Vinitius could scarcely hear her.

But he did not believe her, and drawing her arm still more vigorously, he would have pressed her to his heart, which, in the glow of passion awakened by the beauty of the girl, was beating like a hammer; he would have made her ardent declarations, were it not that the elder Aulus appeared on the myrtle framed path.

"The sun is setting," he said, "be careful of the evening cold, and do not trifle with Libitina, the goddess of funerals."

"Nay," answered Vinitius, "although I have not yet resumed my toga I do not feel the cold."

"But over the hill even now one sees but half the sun's disk," continued the old warrior in a warning voice. "We have not here the favorable climate of Sicily, where at evening the people assemble in the market square, that they may salute the setting Phoebus with a parting song."

Forgetting that but a moment before he had warned them against Libitina, Plautius began to speak about Sicily, where he had estates and extensive farms, to which he was much attached. He mentioned also that he thought many times of moving to Sicily and there spending the remainder of his life in quietness. "He whose head has been whitened by many winters has no further need of frosts. The leaves are not yet falling from the trees, and the sky smiles on the city lovingly, but when the grape vine grows sere, when the snow falls on the Alban hills and the gods with piercing winds visit the Campania, he, perhaps, might remove with his whole household to his retired country farm."

"Can it be that thou wishest to leave Rome?" asked Vinitius in alarm.

"For a long time I have been striving to that end,"

answered Aulus, "because it is quieter and safer."

He began again to praise his garden, his herds, his house, hidden in the verdant hills, where buzzed swarms of bees. Vinitius, however, was not tempted by the bucolic picture, and, thinking only that he would be deprived of Lygia, looked aside towards Petronius, as if salvation could come from him alone.

Meanwhile Petronius, seated near Pomponia, enjoyed the view of the setting sun, the garden and the people standing in the garden. Against the dark background of the myrtles, their white garments were bathed with the golden reflection of the sunset. The evening light, which had previously empurpled the horizon, began to change to violet, and then to opal; the zenith of the heavenly dome became lilac colored. The dark silhouettes of the cypresses were defined still more strictly than in the day—among the people, in the trees and in the whole garden reigned an evening calm.

Petronius was astonished by this calm—especially at that of the people. There passed over the features of Pomponia, of Aulus, their son, and of Lygia a something which he had never noticed on the faces which surrounded him daily, or more correctly—nightly. The life led by every one here filled, as it were, the whole soul with light, and instilled it with a certain peace and tranquillity. He reflected with a degree of wonder that there existed a beauty and delight which he, who was constantly seeking for beauty and delight, might not discover. He could hardly disguise this thought, and, turning to Pomponia, he said:

"I was considering how unlike is your world to that which Nero rules."

She turned her slight face to the evening light, and replied with simplicity:

"The world is ruled not by Nero but by—God."

The conversation was interrupted. Near the dining room in the avenue was heard the footsteps of the old commander, of Vinitius, Lygia and little Aulus. But before they came up Petronius asked:

"Which means that thou believest in the gods, Pomponia?"

"I believe in God who is one, almighty, all-merciful," answered the wife of Aulus Plautius.

CHAPTER III

She believes in one God, "almighty and all-merciful," repeated Petronius, when he found himself again with Vinitius in the litter. "If her God be almighty, life and death are in his power; but if he be all-merciful then justly does he send death. Then wherefore Pomponia mourn Julius? By mourning for Julius she rebukes her God. I will repeat this course of reasoning to our Bronzebearded ape since I deem myself the equal of Socrates in dialectics. As regards women, I agree that each of them has three or four souls, but not one of them has a reasoning soul. Pomponia ought to reason with Seneca or Cornutus on the essence of their great Logos. Let them summon the shades of Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno, and Plato, who are as wearied in the Cimmerian regions as a finch in a cage. I wanted to speak to her and Plautius about something else! By the sacred belly of the Egyptian Isis! If I should have told them frankly the purpose of our coming, their virtue would surely have begun to thunder like a copper shield struck with a stick. And I did not determine to tell, nor did I dare to! Wilt thou believe, Vinitius, I dared not. Peacocks are very beautiful birds, but their cry is too piercing. I was frightened, dreading the cry. I ought to praise thy taste. A genuine 'rosy-fingered Aurora.' And dost thou know of what she reminded me besides?—Spring! not our Italian spring, when apple trees are rarely covered with blossoms, and olive trees are unchangingly gray, but that spring which I happened to see in Switzerland—young, fresh, vividly green. By this pale moon, I wonder not at thee, Marcus.

Be assured that thou hast fallen in love with Diana, and that Aulus and Pomponia are able to lacerate thee as in ancient times the dogs lacerated Actaeon."

Vinitius bowed his head in silence for a time. Then in a voice husky with passion he began:

"I desired her before, but now my desire is still greater. When I touched her arm a flame swept through me. I must have her. Were I Zeus, I would surround her with a cloud, as he did Io, or I would descend on her in the form of rain, as he did on Danae. I would continue to kiss her on the lips until they smarted. I would desire to hear her scream in my arms! I am ready to kill Aulus and Pomponia, and capture her and carry her away into my house. I will not close my eyes to-night. I will order that one of my slaves be beaten, and I will listen to his groans—"

"Calm thyself," said Petronius. "What desires! Like those of a carpenter from the Suburra."

"It matters not to me what thou sayest. I must possess her! I have come to thee for aid, but if thou canst do nothing, I know what is left for me to do. Aulus considers Lygia his daughter; then why shall I regard her as a slave? If there is no other way, let her wind the door of my house with thread; let her anoint it with wolf's fat, and sit as my wife at my hearth."

"Calm thyself, thou mad descendant of the consuls! We bring barbarians tied to our carts not for the purpose of marrying their daughters. Beware of extreme measures. Use first of all the simple, becoming means and leave thyself and me time for reflection. There was a time when Chrysothemis seemed to me a daughter of Jupiter, yet I did not marry her. Nero did not marry Actea, though they feigned that she was a daughter of King Attalus. Calm thyself! Do not forget that Aulus and his wife have no right to retain her, if Lygia is willing to leave their house for thee. And know that not alone art thou burning with desire; Eros hath lit in her also a flame of passion. I noticed that, and I am an observer to be trusted. Summon thy patience. Every-

thing can be accomplished. But I have thought too much to-day, and I am tired of thinking. However, I promise thee that I shall consider thy love case to-morrow. I should not be Petronius if I could not find some remedy."

Again there was silence. At length Vinitius said, more calmly:

"I thank thee, and may fortune bless thee."

"Have patience."

"Where didst thou order us to be borne?"

"To Chrysothemis."

"Happy man, to possess the woman thou lovest."

"I? Dost thou know what amuses me about Chrysothemis? This, that she is untrue to me with my own freedman, Theocles, and imagines that I do not notice it. There was a time when I loved her, now I am merely amused by her lies and her stupidity. Let us go together to her. If she commences to coquette with thee, and draw letters on the table with wine-steeped fingers, know that I am not jealous."

They gave command to be carried to Chrysothemis. In the vestibule Petronius placed his hand on Vinitius's shoulder, and said:

"Wait; it seems to me I have found a way."

"May the gods all reward thee!"

"Yes, yes! I think it will go without a hitch. Knowest thou what, Marcus?"

"I hearken to thee, my wisdom."

"After a few days the divine Lygia will taste the gifts of Demeter in thy house."

"Thou art greater than Caesar!" enthusiastically exclaimed Vinitius.

CHAPTER IV

Petronius was as good as his word. The day after his visit to Chrysothemis he slept till evening.

Then he directed that he should be carried to the Palatine Hill, where he had a private conversation with Nero. The results of this conversation were not long in coming to light. On the third day a centurion with a small legion of pretorian soldiers appeared before Plautius's house.

In that period of lawless and bloody deeds such messengers were generally heralds of death. From the moment when the centurion knocked with his hammer at Aulus's gate, and the guard of the court announced the presence of soldiers in the vestibule, a sudden terror seized the entire house. The family surrounded the old commander. There was no doubt that peril threatened Aulus especially. Pomponia, throwing her arms about his neck, clung to him with all her might, while she whispered words which were almost unintelligible. Lygia, her face white as a sheet, kissed his hand; little Aulus clung to his toga. From the corridors, from the apartments on the upper floor reserved for the servants, from the domestics' room, from the baths and the arches of the lower dwelling, from the whole house, in short, crowds of slaves of both sexes began to pour forth. Cries of "Alas! alas!" and "Miserable me!" were heard repeatedly. The women began to cry; some of the slaves were already scratching their cheeks, while others covered their heads with their handkerchiefs.

Only the old commander, who had accustomed himself for many years to look death in the face, preserved his self-composure. His small, aquiline face was like stone. After he had ordered his servants to cease crying, and to return to their rooms, Plautius said, "Leave me alone, Pomponia. If my end has come, we have yet time to say good-bye."

He pushed her gently away. Pomponia cried:

"I pray to God I shall share death with thee, Aulus."

Then kneeling, she began to pray with the fervor which could be inspired only by fear in behalf of one beloved.

Aulus went into the hall, where the centurion was wait-

ing for him. It was the old Caius Hasta, his former subordinate, and his companion in arms in the wars in Britain.

"I greet thee, General," said he. "I bring thee a command and a greeting from Caesar, here are the tablets and the signet certifying that I come in his name."

"My thanks to Caesar for his greeting, and I shall fulfill his commands," answered Aulus. "I greet thee, Hasta; tell me what commands thou bringest to me."

"Aulus Plautius," began Hasta, "Caesar has learned that in thy house is living the daughter of the Lygian king, who during the time of the divine Claudius was given to the Romans as a hostage that the boundaries of the empire should never be violated by the Lygians. The divine Nero is thankful to thee, commander, for the hospitality shown her so many years, but not desiring to burden thy house any longer, and considering that this girl, as a hostage, ought to be under the protection of Caesar himself, and the Senate, he commands that thou deliver her to me."

Aulus was too hardened a warrior, and too valiant a man, to permit himself to answer a command by lamentations, useless words and complaints. Yet on his forehead there appeared a wrinkle of sudden anger and sadness. Years ago the British legions had trembled before Aulus's eyebrows, contracted in this way. For a moment fear was reflected in Hasta's face. But now, before Caesar's command, Plautius felt disarmed. He looked for a time at the tablets and signet, and raising his eyes towards the old centurion, said calmly:

"Wait thou, Hasta, in the hall until the hostage is delivered to thee."

When he had said this, he went to the other end of the house, in the room where Pomponia, Graecina, Lygia and little Aulus were awaiting him with alarm.

"Death threatens none, nor banishment into far-off islands," said he. "Nevertheless, Caesar's messenger is a herald of misfortune. Lygia, it concerns thee."

"Lygia?" exclaimed Pomponia, perplexed.

"Yes," returned Aulus.

Turning to Lygia, he began:

"Lygia, thou hast been brought up in our house, as our child. Both Pomponia and I love thee as our own daughter, but thou art a hostage, confided by thy nation to Rome; and the guardianship over thee belongs to Caesar, and now Caesar takes thee from our house."

Plautius spoke calmly, but in a strained, changed voice. Lygia listened to his words, her eyes opening and shutting in bewilderment, not understanding what was the matter. Pomponia's cheeks turned pale. At the door leading from the corridor to the salon appeared the terrified faces of the female slaves.

"The will of Caesar must be fulfilled," said Aulus.

"Oh, Aulus!" exclaimed Pomponia, throwing her arms about the girl as if to protect her, "it would be better for her to die!"

Lygia, leaning on her breast, repeated, "Mamma, mamma," not finding in her agony any other words.

Aulus's face contracted again with wrath and grief.

"If I were only alone in the world," said he gloomily, "I would not surrender her alive, and my relatives would have this very day to bring offerings to Jupiter Liberator. But I have no right to ruin thee and our son, who may live to see happier days, so I will apply to Caesar to-day and will entreat him to change his mind. Whether he will listen or no, I wot not. But now, Lygia, farewell. Know thou that Pomponia and I have always blessed the day when thou first sat at our hearth."

He put his hand on her head. Despite all his efforts to preserve his calm, when Lygia turned her tearful eyes upon him, and, catching his hand, began to cover it with kisses, Aulus's voice vibrated with the deep grief of a parent.

"Farewell, our joy and light of our eyes!" he cried.

Turning quickly he went into the hall so as not to surrender to an emotion unworthy a Roman and a general.

Meanwhile, Pomponia, conducting Lygia to her bedroom, began to console and encourage her with words

which had a strange sound in this house, where in an adjoining room stood the sanctuary of the household deities and the altar on which Aulus Plautius, true to ancient custom, made offerings to the domestic gods.

"The hour of trial has come. Virginius stabbed his daughter to save her from Appius; Lucretia redeemed her shame with the price of her life. Caesar's house is a den of corruption, vice, and crime. But we, Lygia, have no right to commit suicide. We submit to another law, more sublime and more holy, and this law permits us to defend ourselves from sin and infamy, even if we have to pay the price of death and torture. It is by far a greater glory for a person to come out pure from the house of infamy. Our world is such a den, but, fortunately, our life is short, and the real life begins after the resurrection from the dead, beyond which not Nero rules, but Mercy, and where pain is effaced by delight, and tears by joy." Then she began to speak of herself. Yes, she was quite calm, but there were painful wounds in her heart.

Her husband's moral vision was not penetrating, his soul did not glow with a single ray of eternal light. She could not even bring up her son in the spirit of truth. And when she reflected that this condition of things might be prolonged to the end of her life, and that then might come a moment of separation, a hundred times more terrible than that temporary one over which they were lamenting, she could not imagine herself happy without them even in heaven. And she had already spent many sleepless nights in tears and prayers, imploring pardon and mercy. But she brought her sufferings to God; she waited and hoped. Even now, when a new blow struck her, when the command of the tyrant took from her a dear one, whom Aulus called the light of their eyes, Pomponia still hoped, believing that there was a power above Nero's, and a mercy greater than his wrath.

She pressed the girl's head still more closely to her breast. Lygia dropped to her knees, and, hiding her face in the folds of Pomponia's garment, was silent for

a long time. When she finally raised her head, she had in a measure recovered her calm.

"Although with great suffering I think of leaving thee, mother, and father, and my brother, yet I know that resistance would not help but would destroy us all. I swear that I will never forget thy words in Caesar's house."

Throwing her arms again around Pomponia's neck, Lygia went with her to take farewell of the young Aulus, of the old Greek who was their teacher, of the servant who had nursed her, and all the slaves.

One of these, a huge, broad-shouldered Lygian, who in Aulus's house was called Ursus, or the Bear, and who came to the Roman camp with Lygia, her mother and their slaves, fell at her feet, and then, kneeling before Pomponia, said imploringly:

"Oh, lady, permit me to follow my mistress. I will serve her and watch over her in Caesar's house."

"Thou art Lygia's servant, not mine," answered Pomponia Graecina. "But I doubt if thou wilt be admitted into Caesar's gates. How couldst thou watch her?"

"I know not. But this I know, iron I can break as if it were wood."

At this moment Aulus Plautius approached them, and when he learned what they were talking of, not only raised no objection, but declared that they had not even the right to detain the Lygian. They were by Caesar's command sending Lygia, as a hostage; therefore, they were also bound to send her suite under Caesar's protection. At this he whispered to Pomponia that, under the name of suite, she might send as many slaves as she deemed necessary. The centurion would make no objection.

As there was some consolation to Lygia in this arrangement, Pomponia was pleased that she was able to surround Lygia with servants of her choice. Therefore, she assigned her, in addition to Ursus, an old servant, two Greek women from Cyprus who were expert hair dressers, and two German girls to tend her at her bath. She chose

none but followers of the new faith, which Ursus had professed for several years. For this reason Pomponia felt that she might rely on the servants' devotion, and also consoled herself by thinking that the seeds of truth would soon be sown in Caesar's house.

Besides this, she wrote a few lines to Caesar's freedwoman, Actea, committing Lygia to her protection. For, although Pomponia had never seen her at the meetings of the adherents of the new faith, she was told that Actea never refused to assist them, and read with eagerness the Epistles of Paul of Tarsus. She also knew that the young freedwoman was constantly distressed because of the difference between herself and the rest of Nero's women: in a word, she was the incarnation of the spirit of virtue in the palace.

Hasta promised to deliver this letter to Actea in person. And deeming it natural that a king's daughter should be surrounded by her suite, he did not refuse to take the servants to the palace. On the contrary, he was surprised at their small number. All he asked was that the preparation for the start be hastened, fearing that he might be accused of lack of zeal in executing his order.

The moment of parting came. Pomponia's and Lygia's eyes again filled with tears, and Aulus laid his hand on the girl's head. A moment later, pursued by the cries of little Aulus, who had been threatening the centurion with his tiny fists in defense of his sister, the soldiers conducted Lygia to Caesar's palace.

When the old commander had ordered that a litter should be gotten ready for him, he went into the picture gallery with Pomponia, and said:

"Listen, Pomponia. I will apply to Caesar, though I think my effort will be fruitless, and I shall see Seneca, though Seneca's opinion counts for nothing with him. Petronius and Vinitius have more influence. Caesar probably never heard of the Lygian nation, and if he demanded Lygia as a hostage it is manifest he did so through some one's influence. It is not hard to guess whose."

Pomponia raised her eyes in agitation.

"Petronius's?"

"Yes."

There was a brief silence, and the commander continued:

"See what it means to let one of these conscienceless and dishonorable persons pass one's threshold. Cursed be the moment Vinitius entered our house! It is he that brought Petronius. Woe to Lygia! It is not a hostage they want, but a harlot."

From anger, helpless agitation and pity for his adopted daughter his voice was more than usually husky. For some time he had been trying to conquer his emotion, and his clenched fist indicated how severe was the struggle.

"The gods I have honored. But at this moment I think the gods do not rule the world. There is but one divinity, malevolent, vindictive, monstrous, and his name is—Nero!"

"Aulus!" exclaimed Pomponia. "In the sight of God, Nero is as a handful of perishable dust."

Aulus strode heavily over the mosaic of the gallery. Many acts of valor he had accomplished, but he had known no great misfortune. Therefore he was not prepared for this unforeseen blow. The old commander was attached to Lygia more deeply than he knew. He could not realize that he was to be deprived of her. Moreover, he felt insulted. A hand which he contemned was over him, yet he knew that he was powerless against it.

At length, conquering the anger which had overshadowed his mind, Plautius said:

"Petronius, I fancy, did not take Lygia from us for Caesar; he would fear Poppaea's vengeance. Consequently, he took her either for himself or for Vinitius. I shall investigate the case to-day."

Shortly afterwards he was being carried in a litter in the direction of the Palatine Palace, while Pomponia, left alone, went to comfort little Aulus, who was still crying for his sister and threatening Caesar.

CHAPTER V

As Aulus had expected, he was denied admittance to Nero's presence. He was told that Caesar was engaged in singing with Terpnos, the lute player, and that he generally received only such persons as were summoned by him, which meant that Aulus must not hereafter even try to obtain an interview with Caesar.

But Seneca, even though suffering from fever, received the old commander with due respect. When he had heard his tale a mournful smile came to his lips as he said:

"One service, noble Plautius, I can render thee: I promise not to reveal to Caesar my pity for thee, nor my readiness to assist thee. If Caesar had the least suspicion of this, he would never return Lygia to thee, even were it only to thwart my wish."

Seneca advised him not to apply to Tigellinus, nor to Vatinius, nor to Vitelius. They were not above bribes, they might be glad to do an injury to Petronius, whose influence they were trying to undermine. But more probably they would tell Caesar how much Lygia was prized by Plautius and his wife. Nero would become all the more unwilling to return her.

Then the venerable sage, assuming a sarcastic tone, continued:

"Thou hast held thy tongue, Plautius, held it so many years, and Caesar likes not those who are silent. And how couldst thou withstand the fascinations of his good looks, his virtue, his singing and recitations, his chariot driving, and his poems? Why didst thou abstain from rejoicing at the death of Britannicus, and fail to write a panegyric in honor of the matricide, and bring thy congratulations when Octavia was suffocated? Aulus, thou hast not the foresight possessed by us who live in the palace here."

Taking a cup he carried at his belt, he filled it at the fountain, and moistening his lips, added:

"Ah, Nero is grateful. He loves thee because thou hast served Rome, and made his name glorious in the four corners of the earth. Me he loves because I taught him in his youth. For that reason I know that this water is not poisoned, and drink it peacefully. Wine would scarcely be harmless; but if thou art thirsty thou mayest drink this water without fear. The aqueduct brings it from over the Alban Hills, so that were it to be poisoned all the fountains in Rome would be so. Thou seest even in this world one may enjoy a peaceful old age in security. I am sick—but in mind rather than body."

True it was Seneca did not have the mental courage of such men as Cornutus and Thrasea. His whole life had been spent in indulging and conniving at crime. He felt this himself; he admitted his adherence to the doctrine of Zeno of Citium; acknowledged that he ought to have chosen another course—and suffered more because of it than from fear of death.

Plautius broke in on his self-recrimination:

"Noble Annaeus," said he, "I know how Caesar hath repaid thee for the care thou gavest him in his youth. But our child has been taken from us at the instigation of Petronius. Tell me how to prevail on him, how to sway him, and do thou employ all the eloquence thine old friendship may suggest thee."

"Petronius and I," answered Seneca, "belong to different camps. I know of no remedies with which to mollify him. No one's influence prevails on him. Perhaps, in spite of his corrupt nature, he is better than the other rascals that surround Nero at present. But to attempt to demonstrate to him that he has done wrong is a profitless waste of time. Petronius long ago lost the capacity of distinguishing good and evil. Prove to him that what he does offends against good taste, and he will be ashamed. When I see him I will tell him his con-

duct is worthy of a freedman. If that does no good, then nothing will."

"Thank thee even for that," answered the commander.

After this he directed that he should be borne to Vinitius, whom he found practicing fencing with his private master. When Aulus saw how the young man was calmly occupying himself with athletics after the attempt against Lygia, he was overwhelmed by rage. Scarcely had the curtain fallen on the departing fencing master than his anger found vent in shrill reproaches and crimination. But as soon as Vinitius heard that Lygia had been carried away, he became so pale that even Aulus could no longer suspect him of being an accomplice. The young man's forehead was moist with sweat. His blood, after surging to his heart, rushed like a hot wave back to his face; his eyes flashed; his lips moved in incoherent questioning. Jealousy and rage buffeted him like a hurricane. It seemed to him that from the instant Lygia entered Caesar's house she was lost to him. But when Aulus mentioned Petronius's name, quick as lightning the suspicion flashed across the young man's mind that Petronius had tricked him, thinking either to curry new favors from Nero by giving him Lygia, or to keep the girl for himself. He could not admit the possibility of any one seeing her and not being fascinated by her. Quick-tempered, like the other members of his family, a paroxysm of rage deprived him of his reason and carried him away like an angry horse.

"Commander," said he, in a broken voice, "go home and wait for me. Know that were Petronius mine own father, I should avenge this insult against Lygia. Go home and await me. Neither Petronius nor Caesar shall have her."

Turning to the draped wax statues in the court, he shook his fist and exclaimed:

"By the faces of the departed, rather would I kill her and myself!"

Then he repeated, "Wait for me," and running from

the court, flew like a madman to Petronius, pushing aside every one he met on the way.

Aulus went home somewhat hopeful that if Petronius had persuaded Caesar to take Lygia away to give her to Vinitius, Vinitius would return her to her foster-parents. He was also consoled by the reflection that if he should not succeed in saving Lygia the insult to her would be avenged by death. He knew Vinitius would fulfill his promises. He was a witness to his rage, and he knew the reputation of the family for passion. He himself, who loved Lygia as a father, would prefer to kill her than to give her to Caesar; and but for the fear of injuring his son (the last of the old line) he would certainly have done so. Aulus was a soldier, and knew of the stoics only by report. But he was not unlike them in character. He preferred death to disgrace.

When he reached home he pacified Pomponia, telling her of his hopes, and both awaited news from Vinitius. At intervals, when the approaching steps of the slaves were heard in the hall, they imagined that Vinitius had come, bringing them their beloved girl, and from the bottom of their hearts they were ready to bless both of them. But time passed, and no news came. Not till evening was a hammer stroke heard on the gate.

A slave delivered a note to Aulus. The old commander, who usually liked to make a show of self-control, now took the letter with a trembling hand, and began to read as rapidly as if its contents concerned his whole family.

His face was suddenly overcast, as if shadowed by an approaching cloud.

"Read," said he, turning to Pomponia.

Pomponia took the letter and read:

"Marcus Vinitius greets Aulus Plautius. What has been done was done by Caesar's will, before which thou must bow thy head, even as do Petronius and I."

They fell into prolonged silence.

CHAPTER VI

Petronius was at home. The doorkeeper did not dare to stop Vinitius, who broke into the hall like a tempest. Learning that the master of the house was in the library, he speeded thither. Finding Petronius was writing, Vinitius snatched the reed from his hands, broke it and threw it on the floor. Then he laid his hands upon Petronius's shoulders and, thrusting his face under his, cried in a hoarse voice:

"What hast thou done with her? Where is she?"

Then an astonishing thing happened. The elegant and indolent Petronius seized the hands which grasped his shoulder, and, pressing them in one hand as in a vice, said:

"I am weak only in the morning, but in the evening I recover my courage. Try to escape. A weaver must have taught thee gymnastics, and a blacksmith politeness."

He said this without any sign of anger, but in his eyes there was a hint of boldness and energy. After a few moments he dropped the hands of Vinitius, who stood before him, humbled, abashed, yet with furious rage in his heart.

"Thou hast a hand of steel," said the younger man, "but by all the infernal gods, if thou hast betrayed me, I will put a knife into thy throat, even though I should have to do it in the chambers of Caesar."

"Let us talk calmly," replied Petronius. "Steel, as thou seest, is stronger than iron; therefore, though from each of thy arms both of mine could be made, I am not afraid of thee. But I grieve over thy rudeness and if human ingratitude could astonish me, I should be astonished at thy ingratitude."

"Where is Lygia?"

"In a house of ill-fame; in other words, in the house of Caesar."

"Petronius!"

"Calm thyself. Sit down. Caesar promised to fulfill two requests of mine, first, to get Lygia out of the house of Aulus, and, secondly, to give her to thee. Didst thou conceal a knife in the folds of thy toga? Perhaps thou dost want to stab me? I advise thee to postpone the attempt for a few days, otherwise thou wouldst be thrown into prison, and Lygia would weary herself in thy house."

Silence ensued. For some time Vinitius looked at Petronius with astonished eyes; then at last he said:

"Pardon me; I love her—love blinds my mind."

"Look at me, Marcus. The day before yesterday I said to Caesar: 'My nephew hath fallen so deeply in love with an emaciated maiden in the house of Aulus, that his house has been turned by his sighs into a steam bath. Neither thou,' said I to Caesar, 'nor I, who understand what real beauty is, would give for her a thousand sesterces, but this youth is stupid, and now he has lost his mind entirely.'"

"Petronius!"

"If thou dost not understand that I said it with the purpose of protecting Lygia, I am prepared to think that I said the truth. I told Caesar that a man of his aesthetic tastes could not consider her a beautiful woman. Nero, who still looks at everything through my eyes, will not find her beautiful. And Poppaea will evidently try to get her out of the palace at the earliest opportunity. And I continued to say carelessly to Bronzebeard: 'Take Lygia and give her to Vinitius. Thou hast the right to do so, because she is a hostage. Moreover, in doing this, thou wilt annoy Aulus. So he agreed. He had no reason to dissent, especially as I gave him the opportunity to do an ill turn to decent people. Thou wilt be appointed an official guardian over her. This Lygian treasure will be committed to thy care. Surely thou, as an ally to the brave Lygians, and a true servant to Caesar, wilt not lose the treasure, but wilt do thy best to

increase it. Caesar, in order to preserve appearances, will retain her a few days in his house, and then he will send her to thy island. Fortunate man!"

"Is that true? In Caesar's house? Is she in no danger?"

"Should she have to stay there permanently, Poppaea would mention her name to the poisoner, Locusta, but for a few days she can remain in safety. In Caesar's house live ten thousand people. Nero may not see her at all, which is the more likely because he has left the matter entirely in my hands. Only a few moments ago a centurion came to me with the information that the maiden had been taken into the palace and delivered into the hands of Actea. Actea is kind and good, and that is why I directed that Lygia be entrusted to her guardianship. Pomponia Graecina evidently thinks the same, as she has sent Actea a letter. There will be a feast tomorrow in Nero's house. I have secured a place for thee near Lygia."

"Caius!" said Vinitius, "forgive my rage. I thought thou hadst ordered her to be taken away for thyself or for Caesar."

"I can forgive thy anger. But it is more difficult to forgive thy rude manners, indecent shouts, and thy voice reminding one of players at street games. I like it not, Marcus; and in future mend thy ways. Know that Caesar's pander is Tigellinus. Know also that if I desired this maiden for myself, I would look straight in thy eyes and say: 'Vinitius, I have taken Lygia from thee, and I will keep her till I weary of her.'"

With these words he fastened his nut-like eyes on the eyes of Vinitius with an expression of cold self-confidence. The young Tribune was utterly abashed.

"I am guilty before thee," said he. "Thou art good and magnanimous. I thank thee from my heart. Let me ask only one more question: Why didst thou not command that Lygia be brought directly to my house?"

"Because Caesar must preserve appearances. This matter will excite talk at Rome. As we take her as a

hostage she will remain in Caesar's palace until the talk ceases. Then we shall remove her quietly to thy house and the matter ends. Bronzebeard is a cowardly dog. He knows he is omnipotent, yet he tries to give a color of decency to all his actions. Perchance thou art not cool enough to view the case philosophically? I have repeatedly sought to explain why it is that transgression—no matter how powerful and secure be the transgressor, as for instance Caesar—invariably tries to justify itself by law, justice and virtue. Why take this trouble? In my opinion to slay a brother, a mother, or a wife, is an act worthy only of a petty Asiatic king—not of a Roman Caesar. But had I done any of these things, I should not write letters of justification to the Senate. And Nero does write. He is striving to justify his crimes, because he is a coward. On the other hand, Tiberius was not a coward, yet he too always strove to justify himself. Why is this? How strange and spontaneous is this homage of Vice to Virtue! And do you know what I think? I think it is so because transgression is ugly, and virtue is beautiful. Ergo, a genuine man of taste is also virtuous. Ergo, I am virtuous. To-day will I make a libation of wine to the shades of Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias. Manifestly the Sophists are of a little use. Listen, I am not through with my argument. I took Lygia from the Auli to give her to thee. Ah, Lysippus would have made marvellous groups of you two! Both of ye are beautiful, consequently what I have done is beautiful. Being beautiful, it cannot be evil. Look, Marcus, thou seest before thee Virtue personified in Caius Petronius! Were Aristides alive, he would have to come to me for a condensed treatise on Virtue, and pay me a hundred minae for it."

But Vinitius, who was more occupied with the facts than with any treatise on Virtue, answered:

"I shall see Lygia to-morrow, and after that she shall spend every day in my house ceaselessly till death."

"Thou shalt have Lygia, and I will be accountable to Aulus for thee. He will call down the vengeance of all

the gods of the nether world upon me. Would that the creature could take a lesson in declamation as a preparation! However, he will rail against me as my old gate-porter used to rail against my followers—I banished him to the country."

"Aulus has been to see me. I promised to send him news of Lygia."

"Write him that the will of the god-like Caesar is the law of the gods, and that thou wilt call thy first son Aulus. We must give him some consolation. I am ready to ask Bronzebeard to invite Plautius to the banquet. Let him have the pleasure of seeing thee next Lygia!"

"Do not so," replied Vinitius. "I pity them both, especially Pomponia."

Then Vinitius sat down to write the letter which was to deprive the old commander of his last hope.

CHAPTER VII

Before Actea, the former favorite of Nero, even the highest officials had been wont to bow. But even then she did not care to interfere in questions of state. And if sometimes she used her influence over the young emperor, it was only to ask his mercy in some one's behalf. Modest and amiable, she won the gratitude of many, the enmity of none. Even Octavia could not hate her. To jealous rivals she seemed of little consequence. All knew that Actea still cherished a sad, painful passion for Nero, a love sustained not by hope, but by the remembrance of a time when Nero was not only younger and more devoted, but was also a better man. It was known that she dwelt only in these memories, and expected nothing of the future. And as there was no fear that Caesar would return to her, Actea was regarded as an inoffensive being. She was consequently troubled by none.

Poppaea looked upon her as an obedient servant, so harmless that she did not even insist upon her leaving the palace.

Out of regard for his former love, and because he had separated from Actea without a quarrel, and almost in a friendly fashion, Nero did not deny her a certain respect. When he gave her her freedom he allowed her to remain in the palace; gave her a special apartment with a separate bedroom and servants to attend her. And as in their day Pallas and Narcissus, though they were made freedmen by Claudius, were not only invited to that Emperor's feasts, but, as persons of influence, occupied places of honor, so Actea was sometimes bidden to Caesar's table. Possibly this was done because of her attractive figure, which was a real ornament to the banquet. But, in fact, in his choice of table companions, Nero had long since ceased to conform to the rules of decency. An impressive variety of persons of all classes and occupations assembled at his feasts, among them senators—especially those who were ready to play the fool; there were also patricians, both young and old, eager for pleasure, luxury and debauchery. These orgies were attended also by women who, although they bore distinguished names, were not above donning discolored wigs at night and seeking adventures in the dark streets. Beside the eminent senators reclined priests who when the bumpers were down themselves ridiculed their own gods. Here thronged a motley multitude of singers, actors, musicians, dancers of both sexes, verse-writers declaiming their own verses and reckoning how many sesterces will be given them for praising Caesar; underfed philosophers, following with greedy eyes the dishes as they were passed around; famous charioteers, jesters, story-tellers and buffoons—every kind of knave and cheat brought into momentary notoriety by fashion or folly. Among them were many whose long hair concealed ears pierced as a sign of servitude.

The most distinguished guests partook of the feast with Caesar; the remainder furnished them with amuse-

ment while they ate, eagerly waiting for the moment when the servants would allow them to fall upon the remnants of meat and drink. Such guests were supplied by Tigellinus, Vinitius and Vitelius, who were frequently obliged to provide them with clothes befitting Caesar's palace. Feeling more at home in it, the Emperor liked society of this kind. The splendor of the court covered this rabble, as if it were gilded and illuminated with its brilliance. The high and the low of this world, the descendants of glorious familes, the descendants of the lowest of street paupers, true artists and the miserable scrapings of talent rushed into the palace to sate their eyes blinded by almost unimaginable luxury, to come near the giver of all favors, mercies and riches, whose whim, if it could degrade, could also exalt to immeasurable heights.

And now the day had come when Lygia must take part in a feast of that sort. Fear, uncertainty, agitation, quite natural after such a sudden change in her surroundings, contended in her heart with a wild desire to show resistance. She was afraid of the people, the court, and the tumult which appalled her, till losing her self-control she feared the banquet of whose indeceny she had heard from Aulus, Pomponia Graecina, and their friends. In spite of her youth Lygia knew what vice was, for in those days the knowledge of evil came even to children. She knew that ruin threatened her in the palace. Pomponia had warned her of this when they parted. Possessed of a young and innocent heart, and professing the high principles to which her foster mother had made her devoted, she vowed to her mother and herself, and also to the Divine Teacher whom she not only believed in, but loved with her half-childish heart because of the blessedness of His teachings, the agony of His death and the glory of His resurrection, to protect herself against this ruin.

Assured that neither Aulus nor Pomponia Graecina would now be responsible for her actions, Lygia began to consider whether it would not be better to resist and

not go to the feast. On the one side fear and alarm had spoken loudly in her soul; on the other a desire to display courage and firmness influenced her to run to martyrdom and death. For the divine teacher himself commanded one to act in this kind, and had set the example. Pomponia had also told her that the most ardent of those who believe desire with all their soul a test of this kind and pray to meet it. While still in Aulus's house Lygia was at times seized with such a desire. She used to imagine herself a marytr with wounds on her hands and snow-white feet, transcendently beautiful, and borne by white angels into the blue sky. And such visions delighted her imagination. In this there was much that was childish, and also something of vanity, which Pomponia condemned. But now when resistance to Caesar's will would be followed by severe punishment, and the fancied tortures might be turned into realities, there was added to these imaginary tortures a curiosity mingled with fear to know exactly how they would punish, and what tortures they would invent for her.

When Lygia told Actea of what was disturbing her girlish heart, she stared at her as astonished as if she had heard the voice of one in delirium. Disobey Caesar's will? Expose oneself at the very outset to his rage? A child incapable of understanding what it is doing could alone act thus. From what Lygia herself had said, it was clear that she was no longer a hostage, but a girl forsaken by her own people. No international law protected her, and even if she had the protection Caesar was strong enough in a fit of rage to overlook such a protection. It had pleased Caesar to take her, he could dispose of her as he wished. Henceforth she was in his power, a power greater than any other in the world.

"Put thy mind to rest on this point," said Actea persuasively to the young girl. "I also have read the epistles of Paul of Tarsus; I also know that above the earth is God and a Son of God who rose from the dead, but on the earth Caesar alone rules. Remember this, Lygia. I know thy creed does not allow of thy becoming what

I was, and that to you as to the Stoics, of whom Epictetus has spoken to me, one is authorized to choose only death when one must choose between death and infamy. But how canst thou foretell that death as well as infamy threatens thee? Hast thou not heard of the daughter of Sejanus? She was a virgin, but at the command of Tiberius she had to pass through infamy before her death, in order to keep the law, against the punishment of virgins. Lygia! Lygia! do not anger Caesar. When the deciding moment comes, when thou must choose between infamy and death, then act as thy true faith commands, but seek not destruction of thine own will, and do not provoke to anger the infernal, merciless god."

Actea spoke with deep pity, and even with fire. By nature near-sighted, she put her gentle face close to Lygia's, as if to verify the impression produced by her words.

Lygia, throwing her arms with childish confidence about Actea's neck, exclaimed:

"How good thou art, Actea!"

Pleased by the girl's praise and confidence, Actea pressed her to her bosom. Then freeing herself from Lygia's embrace, she answered:

"My happiness and my joy have passed, but I have done no evil."

She began to move with rapid steps about the room, and to speak bitterly as if to herself:

"No, and he was not wicked, either. He considered himself a good man, and wanted to be good. I know that better than any one. All this came afterwards—when he stopped loving. Others have made him what he is. Yes, others, and—Poppaea."

Her eyes filled with tears. For some time Lygia followed her with her blue eyes and then said:

"Art thou sorry for him, Actea?"

"I am sorry," answered the Greek woman, in a low voice.

And she resumed her walk, her face overshadowed by sadness, wringing her hands as if in pain.

Lygia continued to ask her timidly:

"Dost love him yet, Actea?"

"I do." Then she added, "No one loves him but me."

There followed a moment of silence, in which Actea struggled to repress the emotions aroused by the memory. When finally her face resumed its usual expression of repressed grief, she said:

"Let us talk of thyself, Lygia. Drop the idea of resisting Caesar's will. It would be the act of a madman. And calm thyself. I have learned all about this house, and I think that nothing threatens thee at Caesar's hands. Had he commanded that thou shouldst be carried off for his own uses, thou wouldst not have been brought to the Palatine Palace. Poppaea is mistress here, and since she bore him a daughter, Nero is more than ever under her influence. Although it was Nero who gave the order that thou shouldst attend the feast, he has neither seen nor asked of thee—consequently, he cares nothing for thee. Perhaps he took thee away from Aulus and Pomponia merely to spite them. Petronius asked me to have a care for thee, and as thou knowest Pomponia asked the same in her letter—evidently they have talked the case over together. Maybe he did so at her request. If so, if Petronius at Pomponia's request takes thee under his protection, nothing can befall thee. Who knows he may have asked Nero to send thee back to Aulus's house? I do not know how much Caesar loves him, but I can assure you Caesar rarely disagrees with him."

"Ah, Actea," answered Lygia, "Petronius was at our house before I was carried away, and my mother is convinced that Caesar did this at his suggestion."

"If that be true, one ought to be afraid," said Actea.

After a moment's thought she continued:

"Perhaps at a supper Petronius unwittingly mentioned in Nero's presence that there was a Lygian hostage in Aulus's house, and Nero, who guards his prerogatives jealously, demanded they surrender, for the simple reason that hostages belong to Caesar. Besides, he does not like Aulus and Pomponia. No, I doubt whether

Petronius would have resorted to such a method, had he wished to take thee from Aulus's house. I will not say that Petronius is better than the others that surround Caesar, but he is different from them. Finally, Is there no one who would intercede for thee? Didst become acquainted at Aulus's with any of those near to Caesar?"

"I happened to see Vespasian and Titus."

"Caesar likes them not."

"And Seneca."

"It is enough that Seneca advises, for Caesar to do the opposite."

A blush overspread Lygia's bright face.

"And Vinitius?"

"I do not know him."

"He has just returned from Armenia, and is a relative of Petronius's."

"Dost suppose that Nero favors him?"

"Vinitius is liked by every one."

"And would he wish to intercede for thee?"

"Yes."

Actea smiled gently, and said:

"Then thou shalt see him at the feast. At all events, thou must be there. Only a child like thee could think anything else. Besides, if thou wishest to return to Aulus's house, then thou wilt have an opportunity to ask Petronius and Vinitius to intercede for thee, and get thee the permission to return home. If they were here they would assure thee that it would be madness and ruin to attempt to disobey. Caesar, we may suppose, might not notice thy absence, but if he did notice it, and thought that thou hadst dared disobey his will nothing could save thee. Let us go, Lygia. Hearest thou what noise fills the palace? The sun is setting, and the guests will soon begin to arrive."

"Thou art right, Actea," answered Lygia. "I will follow thy counsel."

Probably Lygia could not herself explain how much her decision was influenced by the desire to see Vinitius and Petronius, apart from the curiosity to be present at

least once in her life at such a feast, to see Caesar, and the court and the famous Poppaea and the other beauties and all the unheard-of luxury concerning which wonders were told in Rome. But Actea was right, and the girl acknowledged it. Go to the feast she must. Lygia no longer hesitated; necessity and common sense had united themselves to this hidden temptation.

Actea took her to her private anointing room, to anoint and dress her. Although there was no lack of slave women in Caesar's house, and although Actea had many servants of her own, she decided out of sympathy for the girl whose innocence and beauty had touched her, to dress her herself. In spite of her bereavement and her admiration for the epistles of Paul of Tarsus it was evident that this young Greek woman had retained the old Hellenic spirit which set physical beauty above anything else in the world. As she undressed Lygia she could not refrain from expressing her delight at the lines of her figure, at once delicate and plump, as if formed of roses and mother-of-pearl. Stepping back she gazed with rapture upon this incomparable spring-like beauty.

"Lygia," she exclaimed, "thou art a hundred times more beautiful than Poppaea!"

Brought up strictly in Pomponia's house, where a modest reserve was observed, even when the women were alone, the girl stood beautiful as a charmed dream, harmonious as a work of Praxiteles or a poem, but embarrassed, and blushing from mortification like a rose, her knees pressed together, her hands covering her breasts, her eyes closed. Quickly raising her hands she drew out the pin that confined her hair, and instantly, with a gentle shake of her head, her hair fell about her like a mantle.

Approaching and touching her dark hair, Actea said:

"What wonderful hair thou hast! I shall not sprinkle it with gold powder; where the braids overlap it gleams itself of gold. Only here and there will I sprinkle a little on—a very little. It will scarcely be noticeable; will look as if a ray of light passed through it. How beautiful

must be thy native country where such girls are born."

"I do not remember it," answered Lygia. "But Ursus has told me there are nothing there but forests, forests, forests."

"But flowers bloom in the forests," said Actea, as she dipped her hand in a vase containing verbena, with which she rubbed Lygia's hair.

Then with a gentle pressure of the palm of her hand she rubbed her body with Arabian perfumed oil, and when she had finished Actea put upon her a soft gold-colored, sleeveless tunic, over which was to go the peplum, or snow-white robe of state. As, however, it was first necessary to arrange her hair, the Greek woman wrapped her in a loose white dressing-gown. When she had made her sit down she gave her in charge of the women slaves, and, stepping aside, observed the process of dressing. Two women put white sandals embroidered with purple on her feet, lacing them with golden laces crosswise. When her hair had been arranged they put upon her a state robe with beautiful soft folds. Then Actea, when she had hung pearls about her neck and touched her hair with gold powder, gave orders to begin her own toilet, the while not ceasing to gaze rapturously at Lygia.

She was soon ready, and by the time the first litter arrived at the main gate, Lygia and Actea entered from the lateral portico whence might be seen the main entrance, the inner galleries and court surrounded by a colonnade of Numidian marble.

Little by little the number increased of those who passed under the high arch of the gate over which the beautiful four-horse chariot of Lysias seemed to be bearing Apollo and Diana into the air. Lygia was astounded by the magnificence of the scene, of which the modest house of Aulus could give her no conception. The last rays of the setting sun illumined the yellow Numidian marble, which gleamed with a golden light and diffused rosy tints. Under the columns near the statues of the Danaides, of gods and heroes, passed a throng of

men and women, of themselves resembling statues draped in their togas, state robes and gowns, falling in picturesque folds, on which glowed the light of the setting sun. The gigantic Hercules, his head still illuminated, but plunged to the chest in shadow, looked down on the multitude from aloft.

Actea pointed out to Lygia the senators in broad-bordered togas, and colored tunics, with half moons embroidered on their sandals; the patricians and famous artists; Roman ladies dressed in Roman or Greek or fantastic Oriental costumes, with their hair arranged in the form of towers, pyramids, or after the fashion of the statues of the goddesses, low on the head, and ornamented with flowers. Many of the men and women Actea called by name, adding now brief and often terrible characterizations, which filled Lygia with fear, wonder and confusion. A strange world opened before her; its beauty enchanted her eyes, but her young mind could not grasp the contradictions it presented. In the purple sunset light, among these rows of motionless columns vanishing in the distance, among these statue-like people there was a sense of great composure. It seemed that demigods free from care, undisturbed and blissful, ought to live among the simple outlines of the marble, but Actea's low voice revealed the novel and terrible secrets of the palace. There in the distance is a portico, its columns and pavement still spotted with the blood which sprinkled the white marble when Caligula fell under the knife of Cassius Cheraea; there was his wife killed, and there was his child's head dashed against a stone; under that wing a dungeon is hidden, in which the younger Drusus gnawed his hand for hunger; there was Drusus poisoned, and there writhed in convulsions of terror Gemellus and Claudius; there—Germanicus suffered—everywhere, these walls have heard the cries and groans of the dying, and these very people who are now hurrying to the feast clad in bright tunics, flowers and jewels, may be to-morrow condemned to death; mayhap on many a face a smile hides fear, anxiety and uncer-

tainty for the following day; mayhap the hearts of these seemingly crowned, composed demigods are at this instant seized by flames of passion, avarice and envy. Agitated, Lygia could not follow Actea's words, and although this strange world more and more delighted her eyes, terror oppressed the girl's heart, and her soul was suddenly seized by an inexpressible, boundless longing for her beloved Pomponia Graecina, for Aulus's peaceful home, where ruled not crime but love.

Meanwhile the throng of invited guests continued to pour in from the Apollinis quarter. The uproar and the cries of those who escorted their patrons were heard from behind the gate. The court yard and the colonnades swarmed with Caesar's slaves and slave women, boys and pretorian soldiers who were guarding the palace. Here and there among the white and dusky faces were seen the black faces of the Numidians, with their befeathered helmets, and gilt rings in their ears. Lutes and citheras, and despite the lateness of the autumn, bunches of flowers artificially grown were brought, and hand lamps of gold, silver and copper. The ever-increasing hum of voices mingled with the splashing of the fountain, whose roseate jets, falling from above on the marble, broke on the flagging with a sound as of sobbing.

Actea stopped to talk; but Lygia continued to stare about her as if expecting to see some one. All at once she flushed. Between the columns appeared Vinitius and Petronius. Beautiful, calm as gods in their white togas, they went to the spacious dining hall. To the girl, discovering these two familiar and friendly faces, and especially that of Vinitius among these strange people, it seemed that a heavy burden suddenly fell from her heart. She felt less alone. The inexpressible longing for Aulus's house which a moment before had overwhelmed her became all at once less unendurable. The desire to see Vinitius and to talk with him allayed her fears. To no purpose did she rehearse all the ominous gossip she had heard of Caesar's house, and Actea's words and Pomponia's warnings; in spite of the warning and

all she had heard she now felt that she should go to the feast, not only because she must, but because she wished to, for the simple reason that she should soon hear the dear and charming voice which spoke to her of love and happiness fit for the gods; which still sounded like music in her ears, and her heart fluttered with joy.

Straightway this feeling of joy terrified her. It seemed that she was a traitor to those plain, simple teachings in which she had been brought up, as well as to Pomponia Graecina and to herself. To go to the feast of necessity, and to be glad that such necessity exists, were two quite different things. She felt guilty, sinful, ruined. Despair seized her, tears came into her eyes. Had she been alone she would have thrown herself on her knees, would have beaten her breast as she repeated, "Guilty am I; guilty am I." But Actea, seizing her by the arm, led her through the inner rooms of the dining hall where the banquet was to take place. A veil fell over her eyes, there was a roaring in her ears, and she could scarcely breathe, her heart beat so fast. She saw as in a dream the thousands of lamps gleaming on the tables and the walls; as in a dream she heard the shouts which greeted Caesar, whom she saw as across a mist. The shouting deafened her; the bright light blinded her; the perfumes intoxicated her, and in her bewilderment she barely noticed Actea as she placed her at the table and sat beside her. After an interval a familiar voice called to her from her other side:

"I greet thee, fairest of earthly maidens, and of the skies. I greet thee, divine Callina."

Lygia, recovering herself somewhat, looked round. Vinitius was sitting beside her.

He did not wear his toga, as both convenience and custom required that it be laid aside before the feast. He was dressed simply in a tunic embroidered with silver palms. His bare arms were adorned above the elbows, in Oriental style, with two wide golden bracelets; from the forearm the hair had been carefully removed—

smooth but exceedingly muscular it was, the arm of a veritable warrior, made for the sword and shield. A crown of roses decked his head, and with his eyebrows meeting across his brow, and his beautiful eyes and smooth complexion, he looked like the personification of youth and vigor. His beauty so impressed Lygia that though the confusion she had at first felt had vanished, she was scarcely able to answer:

"I greet thee, Marcus."

"Fortunate are my eyes that behold thee," he added; "fortunate my ears that hear thy voice, more delightful to me than the notes of flute or harp. If I were ordered to choose who should sit at my side—thee or Venus—thee would I choose, my divine maiden."

Vinitius gazed at her as if hastening to satiate his eyes with her beauty; he consumed her with his gaze. His glance glided from her face to her neck, and her bare arms; lingered lovingly on the beauty of her figure; he admired her, enfolded her, devoured her, but with his longing there was mingled a suggestion of bliss, tenderness, boundless admiration.

"I knew that I should meet thee in Caesar's house," he continued. "Nevertheless, when I saw thee, such joy filled my soul that I felt as if I had fallen upon an unexpected fortune."

Lygia, having recovered herself somewhat, and feeling that he was the only one among all these many people who was near her, began to talk with him and to inquire about everything that at first frightened or perplexed her. How did he know that he would see her at Caesar's? and why was she brought here? Why did Caesar take her away from Pomponia? She was terrified, she wanted to go home. She should die of anxiety and alarm but for the hope that he and Petronius would intercede for her with Caesar.

Vinitius said he had learned of her having been carried away from Aulus himself. He did not know why she had been brought hither. Caesar did not account for his actions or his orders to any one. But she must

have no fear, for he, Vinitius, was at her side, and would remain by her. He would rather lose his sight than not see her; he would rather give up his life than leave her. She had become his soul, therefore he would guard her as his own soul. He would build in his house an altar to her, as to a divinity, and would offer myrrh and aloes, and in the springtime apple blossoms and early flowers. If she were afraid to stay in Caesar's house, he could assure her she would not remain there.

Although he spoke vaguely, he did not say all he ought, and sometimes said what was not true, yet there was a ring of truth in his words because his feeling for her was actually sincere. He could not master his feeling of downright pity for her; her words went to his heart when she told him how grateful she was, and assured him that Pomponia would love him for his kindness, and she herself would be grateful to him all her life. Vinitius was deeply touched. It seemed that never again would he be able to resist her wish. He shuddered. Her beauty intoxicated him. He desired to possess her, but he was conscious that she was also very dear to him, and that, like a goddess, he might deify her. Besides, he felt an uncontrollable desire to talk of her beauty and of his love for her. The uproar of the feast increased; he therefore moved nearer to her, and began to whisper words of tenderness and flattery, which, coming from the depths of his soul, had the sound of music and the intoxication of wine.

And they did intoxicate Lygia. Surrounded by these strangers, he seemed ever nearer and ever dearer to her, and deserving of her complete devotion and confidence. He soothed her, he promised to rescue her from Caesar's house, he promised that he would not leave her and would do her wishes. He had, moreover, in Aulus's house spoken of love and the happiness it could bring. Now he confessed frankly that he loved her, and that she was dearer to him than all others. For the first time in her life, Lygia heard words like these from a man. The more she listened the more she felt that a something that

had been slumbering in her was waking, and that her whole being was seized as by a happiness she could not explain—a happiness in which boundless joy mingled with boundless apprehension. Her cheeks began to burn, her heart to beat, her lips parted with amazement. She was alarmed at hearing such protestations, but could not reconcile herself to losing a single word. Now she dropped her eyes, now she turned her radiant face towards Vinitius, timidly as if beseeching him to say on. The noise of conversation, the music, the perfume of the flowers, the Arabian scents, mounted to her head. It was the habit in Rome to recline at the table, but at home Lygia used to have her place between Pomponia and little Aulus. Now near her side was reclining Vinitius, young, athletic, loving, ardent, and she, feeling that he was consumed with passion for her, felt at once shame and pleasure. A delicious weakness possessed her; now she felt as if she would faint, now languorous, as if falling into a dream.

Vinitius was also affected by her proximity. His face grew pale, his nostrils dilated like those of an Arabian steed. It was evident that his heart was beating with unusual force under his tunic; his breath came short and heavy, and his voice was broken. For the first time he felt how near he was to her. His thoughts became confused; a fire raged in his veins which he had in vain tried to extinguish with wine. It was not wine that intoxicated him, but the beauty of her face, her bare arms, her girlish bosom moving under her gilt tunic, her whole body concealed under the folds of her robe—these intoxicated him more and more. At length he seized her by the arm, as he had already done once before at Aulus's, and drawing her near to him, whispered with trembling lips:

"I love thee, Callina, my divine one!"

"Marcus, let me go," said Lygia.

But still gazing at her with eyes dimmed with passion, he continued:

"My goddess, love me—"

At that instant the voice of Actea, who was reclining at the other side of Lygia, was heard saying:

"Caesar is looking at you two."

A sudden anger at both Caesar and Actea seized him. Her words had broken the charm.

Even a friend's voice at such a moment would have sounded disagreeable to the young warrior, but Actea, as he thought, had intentionally tried to interrupt his conversation with Lygia. Raising his head, and looking over Lygia's arm at the young freedwoman, he said angrily:

"The time has passed when thou didst use to recline at the feast at Caesar's side, and they say that thou art growing blind. How, then, canst thou see him?"

With a suggestion of sadness, Actea answered:

"Nevertheless, I can see him. He, too, is near-sighted, and is looking at you through his emerald."

Whatever it was that Caesar had done had caused alarm even among those nearest to him. Vinitius, alarmed in turn, recovered himself and fixed his gaze steadily towards Caesar. Unable at the beginning of the feast to see Caesar distinctly because of her agitation, Lygia ceased to look towards him, carried away by Vinitius's presence and words. She now turned towards Caesar her frightened and curious eyes.

Actea had told the truth. Nero, leaning on the table, with one eye closed, was holding before the other a polished round emerald which he habitually used, and was looking at them. For an instant his glance met Lygia's, and the maiden's heart quaked. As a child she had lived on Aulus's Sicilian estate, and had heard from an old Egyptian slave woman of the dragons that dwelt in the caves of the mountains, and now it seemed to her that the greenish eyes of one of these dragons were gazing at her. Like a frightened child she grasped Vinitius's arm, and in the quick changing series of disconnected impressions which passed through her nothing definite could be distinguished. Was that he, the terrible and all-powerful Caesar? Lygia had never seen him before,

but she imagined him to be quite different. She had fancied his having a dread-inspiring face and a stony expression of malice in his features. What she saw before her now was a large head, joined to a thick neck, which from a distance, in spite of its dreadfulness, looked like that of a child. An amethyst-colored tunic cast a bluish shadow upon his broad, short face. His hair, after the manner set by Otho, was arranged in four curls. He wore no beard, as he had shortly before sacrificed it to Jupiter for which all Rome thanked him, although it was said in secret that he did so because his beard, like that of his whole family, was red. There was something Olympian about his forehead, which projected over his brows. Consciousness of power was reflected in his contracted eyebrows. Under that forehead of a demi-god was the face of a monkey, a drunkard, a mountebank—a face vain, ever reflecting his changing desires, fat and swollen, and, in spite of his youth, sickly and wrinkled. The face was ominous, and most repulsive.

Soon Nero laid the emerald on the table and ceased looking at her. Then the young girl saw his eyes clearly, prominent, blinking in the strong light, glassy, unintelligent, like those of a dead man. Turning to Petronius, Caesar said:

"Is that the hostage with whom Vinitius is in love?"

"Yes, that is she," answered Petronius.

"What is the name of her nation?"

"Lygian."

"Does Vinitius consider her a beauty?"

"Dress a rotten olive root in a woman's state robe, and Vinitius will think her beautiful. But on thy face, matchless judge of beauty, already have I read thy opinion of her. Thou needest not declare thy verdict. Yes, thou art right; she is too withered and thin; a veritable poppy on a slender stalk. But thou, divine aesthete, esteemest the stalk in women, and thou art three times, four times right. The face alone is not sufficient. Much have I learned in thy company, but have not attained to so true

a vision, and I am ready to bet Tullius Senecio his sweetheart that—although at a feast, where all are in a reclining posture, it is difficult to judge the entire figure: nevertheless thou hast already said to thyself: 'She is too narrow in the hips.'"

"Too narrow in the hips," repeated Nero, blinking his eyes. A faint smile hovered on the lips of Petronius. Tullius Senecio, who up to this moment had been conversing with Vestinius, or rather laughing at dreams in which Vestinius believed, now turned to Petronius, and though he had no idea of what they were talking about, he said: "You are wrong; I agree with Caesar."

"Very well," answered Petronius, "I have been holding that thou hast a glimmer of sense, but Caesar insists that thou art an unmitigated ass."

"Good!" said Caesar, laughing, and turning down his thumb, as was the custom in the circus, to indicate that the gladiator had received a blow and was to be put to death.

Vestinius, thinking that the conversation pertained to dreams, exclaimed: "But I believe in dreams, and Seneca once told me that he believed in them also."

"Last night I dreamed that I had become a vestal virgin," said Calvia Crispinilla, bending over the table.

At this announcement Nero clapped his hands and all followed his example, for Crispinilla had been divorced several times and was infamous throughout Rome for debauchery.

She was not confused in the least, but calmly added: "What is there to laugh at? They are all old and ugly. Rubria alone looks like a human being, so there would be two of us, though Rubria gets freckled in summer time."

"But admit, Oh pure Calvia," said Petronius, "that thou couldst become a vestal only in dreams."

"But if Caesar commanded?"

"Then I would believe that even the most improbable dreams might come true."

"Certainly they come true," said Vestinius. "I can conceive that one may not believe in the gods, but how can any one disbelieve in dreams?"

"But predictions?" asked Nero. "It was predicted once that Rome should fall, and that I should reign over the entire Orient."

"Predictions and dreams are closely connected," answered Vestinius. "Once a pro-consul, an utter skeptic, sent a slave to the Temple of Mopsus with a sealed letter which he forbade any one to open. He wished to see whether the god could answer the question contained in the letter. The slave slept in the Temple in order that a revelation might come to him in a dream. When he returned he related his dreams as follows: 'I saw a youth bright as the sun, and he spoke but one word, "Black." The pro-consul, hearing this, grew pale, and turning to his guests, disbelievers like himself, he said: 'Do you know what was written in the letter?' "

Vestinius paused for a second and raised a goblet filled with wine to his lips.

"But what was in the letter?" asked Senecio.

"The letter contained this question: 'Which bull shall I sacrifice, a white or a black one?' "

The interest aroused by this narrative was interrupted by Vitelius, who had come to the feast in an intoxicated condition, and who without reason suddenly burst into senseless laughter.

"What is that keg of tallow laughing at?" asked Nero.

"Laughter distinguishes men from animals," said Petronius, "and he can furnish no other proof that he is not a wild boar."

Vitelius suddenly stopped his laughter. Smacking his lips, greasy from fat dishes and sauces, he looked inquiringly around among the guests as if he had never seen them before, and raising his cushion-like hands, he said in a hoarse voice: "I have lost from my finger the knightly ring which I inherited from my father."

"Who was a cobbler," added Nero.

Vitelius burst out again in uncontrollable laughter, and began searching for the ring in the robe of Calvia Crispinilla. Whereupon Vestinius began to imitate the scream of a frightened woman. And Nigidia, a friend of

Calvia, a young widow with the face of a child and the eyes of a wanton, said in a loud tone: "He is searching for what he has not lost."

"And for what would be of no use to him, even if he should find it," added Lucan.

The uproar increased. Crowds of slaves passed around new courses. From enormous vases, filled with snow and wreathed with ivy, were brought out small vessels containing various kinds of wine. All drank freely. Upon the table and on the guests roses fell at intervals from the ceiling. Petronius implored Nero to add dignity to the feast with his song. A chorus of voices supplemented this request. Nero at first refused. It was not a mere question of courage, he explained, though this always failed him. The gods knew what the effort cost him each time he appeared before the public. But he was held up in the consciousness that something must be done for the sake of art. Besides, as the powers had gifted him with a voice, he could not allow the gifts of the gods to be wasted. He recognized that his very duty to the state forbade them to be wasted. But to-day he was really hoarse. On the previous night he had placed leaden weights on his chest, but all to no purpose. He was even thinking of repairing to Antium for a breath of sea air. Then Lucan urged him to sing in the name of art and humanity. It was known to all present that the divine poet and musician had composed a new hymn in honor of Venus, in comparison with which the hymn of Lucretius was as the howl of a yearling wolf. Let this feast be a genuine feast. So kind a ruler should not expose his subjects to such cruel tortures.

"Be not cruel, O Caesar."

"Be not cruel," repeated all seated near. Nero spread out his hands as a sign that he was compelled to yield. All faces immediately assumed an expression of gratitude, and all eyes were turned towards Caesar. But first he gave a command that Poppaea should be notified that he was about to sing. He informed his auditors that she had not appeared at the feast because she was indis-

posed. But as no medicine brought her such relief as did his singing, he would regret to deprive her of this opportunity.

Poppaea came immediately. She ruled Nero as if he were her subject. Nevertheless, she did not dare to wound his self-love when he appeared in the character of a singer, a charioteer, or a poet. Beautiful as a goddess, she entered the room dressed like Caesar, in a robe of amethyst color, and wearing a necklace of large pearls stolen once on a time from Massinissa. She was golden-haired and dainty. Though she had been divorced from two husbands, she had the face and manner of a virgin.

She was received with applause and shouts of "divine Augusta." Lygia had never in her life seen so wondrous a beauty. She could scarcely believe her eyes, for she knew that Poppaea Sabina was one of the most corrupt women in the world. She had heard from Pomponia that Poppaea had induced Caesar to murder his mother and his wife. She knew something of her terrible deeds from the gossip of the guests of Aulus. She had heard that Poppaea's statues had been overthrown at night-time in the city. She had heard of inscriptions whose authors had been condemned to severest punishment, which nevertheless still appeared every morning on the walls of buildings in the city. But in spite of all this the notorious Poppaea, who was looked upon by the Christians as the embodiment of evil and crime, appeared so sweet and beautiful to the maiden that she thought that so must look the angels and spirits in heaven. Lygia could not take her eyes from the lovely vision, and an involuntary question slipped from her lips:

"O Marcus, can it be possible?"

Excited by wine, and evidently impatient because her attention was distracted from him, he answered:

"Yes, she is beautiful but thou art a hundredfold more beautiful. Thou dost not know thyself, or thou wouldst fall in love with thyself like Narcissus. Poppaea bathes in asses' milk, but thou, I believe, Venus has bathed in her own milk. Thou dost not appreciate

thy value, my sweet one. Look not at her; turn thy eyes towards me, my heart's delight! Touch this goblet of wine with thy lips, and I will place mine on the same spot."

Then Vinitius began to push himself closer and closer to Lygia, but she moved nearer to Actea. At this moment silence was commanded, because Caesar had risen. The singer Diodorus had given him a lute of the kind called delta; another musician, named Terpnos, who was to accompany Caesar, came forward with an instrument called a nablium. Nero, resting the delta on the table, raised his eyes. A hush of silence fell on the banqueting hall, broken only by the rustle of roses as they continued to fall from the ceiling. Caesar then began to sing, or rather to declaim, his hymn to Venus, to the accompaniment of two lutes. Neither his voice, though somewhat worn, nor his verses were bad. Lygia's conscience began to reproach her again; for the hymn, though in praise of the impure and pagan Venus, seemed beautiful to her, and Caesar himself, with a crown of laurel on his head and his eyes raised to heaven, appeared to her more majestic and far less terrible and repulsive than at the commencement of the banquet.

The hymn was received with thunders of applause. Exclamations of "Oh wonderful, divine voice!" rose on all sides. Some of the women raised their hands and held them thus until the end of the singing, as if they had been petrified with delight. Others wiped the tears from their eyes. The entire hall buzzed like a beehive. Poppaea, bending her golden head, pressed Nero's hand to her lips, and held it for some time in silence. Pythagoras, a young Greek of wonderful beauty, the same to whom later the semi-crazy Nero made the priests marry him, with the observance of all the rites, now knelt at his feet. Nero, however, looked attentively at Petronius, whose praises he esteemed above all. The latter said:

"As to the music, I believe that Orpheus must be at this moment as yellow from envy as Lucan, who is here present. As for the verses, I regret that they are not

worse, that I might find words fitting to praise them."

Lucan did not feel offended at being charged with envy. On the contrary, he cast a grateful glance at Petronius, and feigning ill-humor, began to murmur: "Oh cursed fate, that destined me to live as a contemporary of such a poet. I might have a place in the memory of man and on Parnassus, but now I am quenched as is a night-lamp in the sun."

Petronius, who possessed a wonderful memory, began to repeat portions of the hymn, to cite separate verses, and to analyze the finest expressions. Lucan, as if forgetting his envy, joined his ecstasy to the words of Petronius. Nero's face reflected a high and unbounded vanity. He pointed out the verses which he considered the finest. At last he fell to consoling Lucan, telling him not to lose heart, for though no one could acquire gifts which were not bestowed upon him at birth, yet the worship which people gave to Jove did not exclude honor for the other gods.

Then he arose to escort Poppaea, who being really ill, desired to withdraw. Caesar commanded the guests not to leave their places, and promised to return. In fact he returned very shortly to stupefy himself with the smoke of incense and to gaze at the further spectacles prepared for the feast by himself, Petronius, and Tigellinus. The guests were constrained to listen to more verses and dialogues in which extravagance took the place of wit. Then Paris, the famous mime, gave a representation of the adventures of Io, the daughter of Imachus. To the guests, and especially to Lygia, who was unused to such spectacles, it seemed that they were beholding miracles and enchantments. Paris, by gestures of his hands and body, succeeded in expressing things that seemed impossible in a dance. His hands made dim the air, creating a bright cloud, living, trembling with voluptuousness, encircling the form of a maiden, thrilled with a spasm of delight. It was not a dance but a picture, disclosing the secrets of love, enchanting and shameless. When at the end of the dance

Corybantes with a crowd of Syrian dancing girls began a Bacchic dance to the accompaniment of harps, lutes, cymbals and tambourines, a dance full of unbridled license, Lygia began to tremble with fear. It seemed to her that a living fire was burning her into ashes and that a thunderbolt ought to strike the house, or that the ceiling should fall down upon the heads of the revellers. But from the golden net fastened to the ceiling the roses were still falling, and the now drunken Vinitius said to her:

"I saw thee at the fountain in the house of Aulus, and fell in love with thee. It was at dawn, and thou didst think that nobody saw thee, yet I saw thee, and I see thee thus yet, though that robe conceals thee from my eyes. Cast aside thy robe as Crispinilla has done. Behold! gods and men are thirsting for love. There is nothing else in the world. Lay thy head on my breast and close thine eyes."

The blood beat oppressively in Lygia's hands and temples. She felt as if she were crawling into a pit, and as if Vinitius, who before had appeared so devoted and so worthy of all trust, instead of saving her was drawing her down towards the abyss. She felt angry with him. She began to fear the feast, and Vinitius, and herself. A voice like that of Pomponia rang imploringly into her ears: "O Lygia, save thyself!" But at the same moment something told her that it was already too late; that the one whom such a flame had embraced, who had looked on at everything that had happened at this feast, whose heart had beaten as hers had while listening to the words of Vinitius, and who shivered as she did when he came near her, was lost forever. She began to grow weak. It seemed to her that she must faint, and that something terrible must follow. She knew that, under pain of Caesar's wrath, no one might rise until he rose; but even did this prohibition not exist, she now had not strength enough to withdraw.

It was far yet to the end of the feast. Every now and then slaves brought on new courses, and filled the

goblets unceasingly with wine. On a platform there appeared two athletes, to give the guests an exhibition of wrestling.

The contest began. The powerful bodies of the wrestlers, shining with olive oil, blended in one mass; bones cracked in their iron arms, their teeth gritted ominously between their set jaws. At times the quick, dull thump of their feet beat on the saffron-strewn floor; again, the athletes became motionless, silent, so that it seemed to the spectators that they saw before them a group chiselled from stone. The eyes of the Romans followed with delight the motions of terribly exerted backs, thighs and arms. But the struggle was soon ended. Croto, the master and founder of the school of gladiators, was rightly considered the strongest man in the empire. His opponent began to breathe quickly, then his breathing became choked, his face assumed a blue tint, and finally blood flowed from his mouth and he fell. A burst of applause crowned the ending of the struggle. Croto, placing his feet on his opponent's breast, crossed his great arms and looked about him with the eyes of a conqueror.

After the athletes appeared men who mimicked beasts and their voices, conjurors and buffoons, to whom little attention was paid, for wine had dimmed the eyes of the spectators. The feast gradually became a drunken and dissolute orgy. The Syrian damsels who had participated in the Bacchic dance, now mingled with the guests. The music changed to wild and disordered outbursts of harps, lutes, Armenian cymbals, Egyptian cymbals, trumpets and horns. Some of the guests, desiring to speak, ordered the musicians to withdraw. The atmosphere, filled with the odor of flowers and the perfume of oils, with which beautiful boys had anointed the feet of the guests, permeated also with the odor of saffron and the exhalations of the guests, became stifling. The lamps burned with a dim flame; the wreaths drooped on the heads of the guests; their perspiring faces grew pale. Vitelius fell under the table. Nigidia, stripping

herself to the waist, dropped her drunken, child-like face upon the breast of Lucan, who also drunk, began to blow the golden powder from her hair, and followed with delighted eyes the particles as they floated upwards. Vestinius, with drunken iteration, repeated for the tenth time the answer of Mopsus to the proconsul's sealed letter. Tullius, who was mocking at the gods, said in a voice broken by hiccoughs: "If the Spheros of Xenophanes is round, then such a god might be kicked along like a barrel."

But Domitius Afer, a hardened criminal and spy, waxed wrothy at this discourse, and in his wrath poured Falernian wine over his tunic. He had always believed in the gods. People might say that Rome would perish; there were those that said it was perishing now. And no wonder, but if this should come to pass it was only because youth had lost its faith, and without faith there could be no virtue. The stern virtues of former days were neglected. It did not seem to occur to any one that epicureans could not resist the barbarians. And as for himself, he grieved that he lived in such times, and that he was compelled to seek forgetfulness in distractions, otherwise his grief would kill him.

After moralizing thus, he drew towards himself a Syrian dancer and showered kisses upon her neck and shoulders with his toothless mouth. Whereupon Memmius Regulus laughed, and raising his bald head with his wreath all awry, exclaimed:

"Who says that Rome is perishing? Nonsense. I as Consul know better. The Consuls are watchful. Thirty legions are guarding the peace of the Roman Empire."

Placing his hands upon his temples, he began to shout in a voice that filled the whole hall: "Thirty legions, thirty legions, from Britain to the Parthian boundaries."

Then suddenly he became absorbed in thought, and touching his forehead with his fingers, said: "Mayhap there are thirty-two."

At last he rolled under the table, and was soon engaged in heaving up flamingo tongues, roast and chilled

mushrooms, locusts in honey, fish, meat, and everything that he had eaten or drunk. But the number of legions who had guarded the safety of Rome did not pacify Domitius: "No, no!" he cried, "Rome must perish, for faith is lost, and so are the old stern virtues. Rome must perish, and it is a pity, for its life is pleasant, Caesar is the greatest of Caesars, the wine is good! Oh, how sad!" And dropping his head on a Syrian girl's shoulder he burst into tears. "What is the future life? Achilles was right—it is better to be a slave in this world, lightened by the sun, than a king in the Cimmerian gloom. Besides, it is a question still whether there be any gods, though incredulity is the ruin of our youth."

Lucan meanwhile had blown all the golden powder from the hair of Nigidia, who had fallen into a drunken sleep. Then he took garlands of ivy from a vase before him and wound them about her. Then he looked about him with a pleased and inquiring glance. He decked himself with ivy also, and repeated in a voice of deep conviction: "I am no man, but a faun." Petronius was not drunk, but Nero, who drank moderately at first in order to spare his divine voice, drank goblet after goblet towards the end, and had become drunk. He wished to sing more of his verses, this time in Greek, but he had forgotten them and by mistake sang an ode to Anacreon. Pythagoras, Diodorus, and Terpnos accompanied him, but as they could not keep time, they ceased. Nero, as a critic and an aesthetic, was enchanted with the beauty of Pythagoras, and began to kiss his hands. Such beautiful hands, he thought, I have seen but once, and whose were they? Then his face blanched with terror; they were those of his mother, Agrippina.

Terrible visions possessed him forthwith.

"They say," said he, "that she wanders by moonlight, along the sea, around the Baiae and Bauli and ever she walks, walks, walks, and appears to be seeking for something. And when a boat approaches, she looks at it and disappears; but the fisherman on whom she has fixed that look dies forthwith."

"Not a bad theme for a poem," said Petronius.

Vestinius, stretching his neck like a crane, whispered mysteriously: "I believe not in gods, but I do believe in spirits. Oy'."

Nero paid no attention to their words and continued: "I celebrated the Lemuria. But I have no wish to see her. It is now five years ago—I had to condemn her for she set an assassin to murder me, and had I not been the quicker, ye would not have heard my song to-night."

"We thank thee in the name of Rome and of the whole world," exclaimed Domitius Afer. "Wine and let the tympans resound."

The uproar was renewed. Lucan, entwined with ivy, arose and began to shout: "I am not a man: I am a faun, and I live in the woods. E, ho, o, o o, o!"

Caesar was now completely intoxicated; men and women all were drunk. Vinitius was no soberer than the other guests. Besides passionate desire, there arose in him an inclination to quarrel. This happened always when he drank too much. His dark face paled. He stuttered when he spoke, though his voice was loud and commanding:

"Kiss me! To-day, to-morrow, 'tis all the same. I am tired of waiting. Caesar took thee from Aulus to give thee to me. Dost thou understand? To-morrow at evening I will send for thee. Thou must be mine! Kiss me! I will not wait for to-morrow. Give me thy lips at once."

He attempted to embrace Lygia, but Actea defended her, and she herself resisted, exerting the remnant of her strength, for she felt she was on the brink of ruin. In vain did she attempt with both hands to remove his hairless arm; in vain did she implore him in a voice trembling with grief and fear, to take compassion on her. Sated with wine, his breath floated about her, and his face was pressed close to hers. This was no longer the kind Vinitius, almost dear to her heart, but a foul and drunken Satyr, who filled her with abhorrent fear. She grew weaker and weaker. In vain did she writhe and turn

away her face to escape his kisses. He rose and caught her in both arms, and, pressing her head to his breast, he began, panting heavily, to press her white lips with his. At this moment, some invincible power uncoiled his arms from her neck as easily as though they had been the arms of a child, and Vinitius himself was thrust aside as a dried branch, or a faded leaf. What had happened? Vinitius rubbed his astonished eyes. Before him stood the gigantic figure of the Lygian, Ursus, whom he had met at the house of Aulus.

The Lygian stood calmly, but his blue eyes gazed so strangely at Vinitius that the blood congealed in the latter's veins. Then Ursus, with a measured step, quietly conducted his queen out of the banqueting hall. Actea followed him.

Vinitius sat for a moment as if petrified. Then, springing towards the entrance, he shouted: "Lygia! Lygia!" But desire, astonishment, rage, and wine, combined to cut his legs from under him. Staggering, he seized the bare arm of one of the Bacchanals and, with blinking eyes, asked her what had happened. She, with a smile in her eyes, handed him a goblet of wine and said: "Drink!"

Vinitius drank, and fell down upon the floor.

The majority of the guests were now lying under the table, snoring, in drunken slumbers, giving forth the excess of wine. And still upon the drunken Consuls and Senators, upon the poets and philosophers, and upon the dancing damsels, and the patrician ladies, upon the members of a society still dominant, but whose soul was dead and whose end was near, roses fell continually from the golden net fastened to the ceiling.

And out of doors the dawn was breaking.

CHAPTER VIII

No one stopped Ursus, nor did any one inquire what he was doing. Such guests as had not fallen under the

table, no longer retained their places. Therefore, the servants, seeing the giant carrying a guest out on his arm, mistook him for a slave, in charge of a drunken mistress. Moreover, Actea followed him, and her presence removed all suspicion.

In this fashion they made their way from the banqueting hall into the adjoining chamber and thence into the gallery that led to Actea's room. Lygia had become so weak that she hung as if dead on the arm of Ursus. But when the cool, fresh, morning air blew on her face, she opened her eyes. It was growing brighter and brighter. Walking along the Colonnade, they turned to a side portico, leading out, not into the court-yard, but into the Palace gardens, where the tops of the pines and the cypresses were reddening in the morning light. This section of the building was entirely empty. The echoes of the music and sounds of the revel gradually became indistinct. It seemed to Lygia that she had been carried from hell up into the bright light of God above. There was something, then, besides that repulsive banqueting hall. There were the sky, the morning stars, light and peace. The maiden suddenly burst into tears. Pressing herself against the arm of the giant, she repeated between her sobs: "Take me home, Ursus, home to the house of Aulus."

"Let us go," answered Ursus. They had now reached the small hall belonging to Actea's apartments. Ursus placed Lygia on a marble bench near a fountain, while Actea strove to calm her, and urged her to go to sleep. She assured her that there was no longer any danger, as the drunken guests would sleep till evening. But Lygia could not calm herself for a long time, and pressing both hands against her temples, repeated like a child: "Let us go home to Aulus."

Ursus was ready to carry out her wish. Although pretorians stood about the gates, still they could not prevent him from passing. The soldiers would not halt outgoing guests. The space before the arch was crowded with litters. Guests were now swarming out. Nobody

would detain them. They would pass out with the crowd and go directly home. Anyway, he must not question. What the queen commands must be done. He was there to execute her orders.

And Lygia repeated: "Yes, yes, Ursus, let us go."

But Actea began to reason with them both. True, they could go away, nobody would detain them. But it was forbidden to flee from Caesar's house, and who did so was guilty of insulting the majesty of Caesar. They might go away, but at evening a centurion would carry a sentence of death to Aulus and Pomponia Graecina, and Lygia would be brought back to the Palace. Then nothing could save her. Should Aulus and his wife receive her in their house, they would surely be punished.

Lygia let fall her hands. There was no other alternative. She must choose between her own ruin or that of Plautius. In going to the banquet she had hoped that Vinitius and Petronius would intercede for her with Caesar, and return her to Pomponia. Now she knew that it was they who had induced Caesar to take her away from the house of Aulus. There was no help. Only a miracle could save her from the abyss, a miracle and the power of God.

"Actea," she cried in despair, "didst thou hear what Vinitius said, that Caesar had given me to him, and that he would send slaves this evening to carry me to his house?"

"I heard," said Actea, and, dropping her hands to her side, she became silent. The despair which expressed itself in Lygia's words found no echo in her breast. She herself had been Nero's favorite. Her heart, though kindly, was not able to appreciate the shame of such a relation. A former slave, she had become too much used to the law of slavery. Besides, she still loved Nero. Should he desire to return to her, she would stretch out her arms to him and rejoice in her good fortune. Seeing clearly that Lygia must become the mistress of the young and handsome Vinitius, or expose the family who had

reared her to ruin, she could not understand how the maiden could hesitate.

"In Caesar's house," said she, "thou wilt be no safer than in that of Vinitius."

And it did not occur to her that though her words were true, they meant: "Be reconciled with your lot and become the mistress of Vinitius."

Lygia, who still felt upon her lips his kisses burning with desire and glowing like coals, flushed with shame at the very remembrance. "Never," she burst out, "never will I remain here, nor in the home of Vinitius."

Actea marvelled at her excitement. "Is Vinitius so hateful to you?" she asked.

Tears choked Lygia so she could not answer. Actea drew her to her breast and strove to calm her. Ursus breathed heavily and clinched his enormous fists. Loving his queen with a doglike fidelity he could not bear to see her weeping. In his wild Lygian heart arose a desire to return to the banqueting hall and to strangle Vinitius, and, if need be, Caesar himself; but he was afraid lest he should sacrifice his mistress thereby. Nor was he certain in his mind that such an act, which seemed to him quite natural, was entirely befitting a follower of the Crucified Lamb.

Actea, in the midst of her caresses, repeated her question: "Is he so hateful to thee?"

"No," answered Lygia. "I cannot hate him because I am a Christian."

"I know, Lygia. I learned also from the Epistles of Paul, of Tarsus, that you are forbidden to defile yourselves, and to fear death more than sin, but tell me, does your faith permit you to cause the death of others?"

"No."

"How, then, canst thou bring Caesar's vengeance on the house of Aulus?"

There was a moment of silence. The deep abyss yawned before Lygia. Then the freedwoman added:

"I ask because I am sorry for thee, and because I am

sorry for Pomponia and for Aulus and their son. I have lived long enough in this house to know what the wrath of Caesar means. No, thou must not flee from here. There is but one recourse left for thee. Beg Vinitius to return thee to Pomponia."

But Lygia fell on her knees to implore some one else. Ursus followed her example, and they united in prayer in the house of Caesar as the dawn broke through the windows.

Actea for the first time witnessed such a prayer. She could not avert her eyes from Lygia, who, with profile turned towards her, with outstretched hands, and eyes raised towards the sky, seemed there to seek for safety. The morning rays touching her dark hair and white robe were reflected in her eyes. In the glory of the dawn she seemed herself transformed by the light. In her pale face, in her parted lips, in her uplifted hands and eyes shone a supernatural exaltation. And then Actea comprehened why Lygia could not become the mistress of any man. 'Twas as if before the face of Nero's former favorite was drawn aside the corner of a veil that concealed a world entirely different from the one she knew. She was touched by that prayer, offered up in the house of crime and corruption. A moment before she had felt that there was no help for Lygia. Now she began to believe that some unlooked-for thing would happen, that aid would come, so powerful that Caesar himself could not resist it; that a winged army would descend from heaven to rescue the maiden, or that the sun would spread its ray under her and draw her up to itself. She had heard of many miracles that had occurred among the Christians, and Lygia's prayer somehow suggested that all the stories were true.

At length Lygia arose with a face brightened by hope. Ursus rose also, and, sitting on the bench, looked at his lady, waiting for her to speak.

Her eyes grew misty and two large tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. "May God bless Pomponia and Aulus," said she. "I must not expose them to danger, con-

sequently I shall never see them again." Turning to Ursus, she told him that he alone was left her in the world, that he must take the place of a father, a guardian, and a protector. They could not seek shelter in the house of Aulus, for he would thus be exposed to the wrath of Caesar. On the other hand, she could not remain in the house either of Caesar or of Vinitius. Let Ursus take her, let him conduct her out of Rome and hide her somewhere where she could not be found by Vinitius or his slaves. She would follow him everywhere, even beyond the seas, beyond the mountains, to the barbarians, where the name of Rome was unheard and where the power of Caesar did not reach. Let him take her and save her, for beside him nobody was left to her.

The Lygian, in sign of his readiness and obedience, knelt and embraced her feet. Disappointment was evident on the face of Actea, who had looked for a miracle. Was it possible that this was all that would come out of the prayer? To escape from the house of Caesar was to commit a crime against his majesty. Such a crime must be avenged. Even should Lygia succeed in escaping, Caesar's wrath would fall on Aulus and Pomponia. If Lygia desired to escape, let her escape from the house of Vinitius. Then Caesar, who was averse to busying himself with the affairs of others, might not wish to help Vinitius in pursuing her. In any case, such a proceeding would not be a crime against the majesty of Caesar. Lygia's thoughts were as follows:

Aulus would not even know where she had gone; Pomponia would not know. She would escape, not from the house of Aulus, but on the way to it. Under the influence of intoxication, Vinitius had told her that in the evening he would send his slaves for her. Undoubtedly he had told the truth, which would not have escaped him had he been sober.

It was evident that he himself, or perhaps Petronius, had spoken to Caesar and had secured his promise to deliver her on the following evening. If they forgot to send for her to-day they would send to-morrow. But

Ursus would save her. He would come and take her out of the litter, as he had borne her from the banquet hall, and together they would wander over the whole world. Ursus was invincible; not even that terrible gladiator who yesterday had wrestled at the banquet hall was able to overcome him. But, as Vinitius might send a number of slaves, it would be better for Ursus to go at once to Bishop Linus for aid and counsel. The bishop, undoubtedly, would take compassion on her; he would not abandon her to the mercy of Vinitius. He would send Christians with Ursus to rescue her, and would conduct her to a place of safety. Then Ursus would take her out of the city, and hide her from the power of Rome.

Her face flushed and wreathed itself in smiles. She was encouraged, as if the hope of rescue had already turned into reality. Throwing herself on Actea's neck and pressing her beautiful lips to the Grecian's cheek, she murmured:

"Thou wilt not betray me, Actea, wilt thou?"

"By the shade of my mother," answered the freedwoman, "I will not betray thee. But pray to thy God that Ursus may succeed in rescuing thee."

The blue eyes of the giant, simple as a child, grew bright with happiness. He had not been able to form a definite plan, though he had put all his simple mind to the task. But he would follow such orders as were given him. He would go to the bishop, for the bishop reads in the sky what should and should not be done. Even without the bishop's aid he could summon a party of Christians. Had he not plenty of acquaintances among slaves, gladiators and free people, both in the Suburra and beyond the mountains? He could collect a thousand or two. He would rescue his mistress, and take her out of the city and abide with her. They would go to the end of the world, even to his native land, where no one had ever heard of Rome. Here he gazed into space, as if looking into the far distant future, and exclaimed:

"To the forest! Ah, what a forest! What a forest!"

But he shook his dreams from him. Yes, he would go immediately to the bishop, and in the evening he, with a hundred followers, would watch for the litter. What difference if she be escorted by slaves or by pretorians? Better for no man to feel the weight of his fist, even if clad in armor. Iron is not so strong. Should he strike the iron heavily, death would enter the skull beneath.

But Lygia, raising her finger, said with child-like earnestness:

"Ursus, thou shalt not kill."

The giant put his huge fist to the back of his head and rubbing his neck with great seriousness, began to mutter. He must rescue the maiden. She herself had said that it was now his turn. He would do his best. If anything should happen, he would repent, he would pray to the Innocent Lamb for pardon, he would implore the mercy of the Crucified Lamb. He did not wish to offend the Lamb—but who could tell? His fists were so powerful!

Infinite tenderness beamed from his face, but, wishing to conceal his emotion, he knelt and said:

"Now I will go to the bishop."

Actea embraced Lygia and burst into tears. Again she comprehended that there was a world where even suffering allowed of more happiness than all the excesses and luxuries in the house of Caesar.

Once more a door revealing light had been opened, but at the same time she felt that she was unworthy to cross the threshold. And two tears glistened upon her drooping eyelids.

CHAPTER IX

Lygia sorrowed deeply to part from Pomponia Graecina, whom she loved with her whole heart, and also from the household of Aulus. Yet her grief was short-lived. She took a certain pleasure in the very thought that she

was sacrificing plenty and comfort for the Truth; that she was about to expose herself to hardships and uncertainties. Blended with this feeling was, perhaps, an alloy of childish curiosity as to what life was like in remote regions, among barbarians and wild beasts. But, for the most part, she was inspired by deep and earnest faith. She was convinced that she was following the behests of the Divine Master, and that henceforward He would watch over her as over an obedient and faithful child. And, if so, what harm could befall her? Should sufferings come, she would bear them for His sake; should death overtake her, He would receive her. When Pomponia died they would be reunited forever.

Many a time in the house of Aulus she had worried her childish brain with thoughts that she, a Christian, had made no sacrifices for the Crucified One, of whom Ursus spoke so tenderly. Now the time had come to realize her fancies. Lygia felt really happy, and strove to tell Actea of her joy, but the young Grecian could not understand her. To leave everything behind, to abandon home, plenty, the city, gardens, temples, porticoes, all that was beautiful; to leave a sunny land, and the loved ones therein, and for what purpose? To run away from the love of a young and handsome nobleman. Actea's mind could not comprehend this. There were times when she scented some concealed purpose in her actions, mayhap some great, mysterious happiness; but the matter was not at all clear in her mind, especially as dangers threatened Lygia which might destroy her life. Actea was naturally timid, and she thought with dread of what the future might have in store. But she wished not to trouble Lygia with her fears. As the day was clear and the sun shone into the hall, she began to coax the maiden to rest after her sleepless night. Lygia agreed, and they entered a spacious bed chamber, whose luxurious furniture was a reminder of Actea's former relations with Caesar. Here they lay side by side, but Actea, despite her weariness, could not sleep. She had long been unhappy, but now she was possessed by a new uneasiness.

Previously existence had seemed to her merely sad and hopeless. Now it appeared to her shameful.

She became more and more confused in mind. The door that revealed light was now open and now closed. But even when it opened her eyes, unused to the light, were dazzled, and she could distinguish nothing clearly. She divined that in the light there was unbounded happiness, compared with which all else was of small value, so that even if Caesar, for example, should set aside Poppaea and again love her, Actea, this would not now bring her unalloyed happiness. Then the thought struck her that Caesar, whom she loved and regarded as a demigod, was in reality no better than any slave, and his palace, with its columns of Numidian marble, no better than a heap of stones. Thoughts such as these, which she could scarce comprehend, began to torment her. She desired to sleep, but, tormented by doubts, she could not close her eyes. Then, thinking that Lygia, threatened by so many uncertainties and perils, could not sleep either, she turned to speak to her of her flight, which was to take place in the evening.

But Lygia was sleeping peacefully. Into the darkened room, through a curtain not entirely drawn, stole some bright rays, in which floated golden dust motes. By the light of these rays Actea looked upon Lygia's delicate face, resting on her bare arm, her closed eyes and her lips slightly parted. She was breathing regularly, as people breathe while sleeping.

"She sleeps—she is able to sleep," thought Actea. "She is still a child."

Nevertheless, it was borne into her that this child preferred to flee rather than to become the favorite of Vinitius; that she preferred want to infamy, wandering to a luxurious house, to robes, beautiful ornaments, feasts, the music of lutes and cytheras.

Why?

Actea looked more closely at Lygia, as if to read an answer in her sleeping face. She looked at her beautiful forehead, at her arched eyebrows, at her dark lashes, her

parted lips, her heaving bosom, and she thought "How different she is from me!"

Lygia appeared a miracle to her, as some divine vision, a creation of the gods, a hundredfold more beautiful than all the flowers in Caesar's garden and all the statues in his palace. But in the Grecian's heart there was no envy. On the contrary, at thought of the dangers that threatened the maiden, she melted into pity; a mother's love was awakened in her. Lygia appeared to her not only as beautiful as a dream, but as very dear to her heart. Pressing her lips to the dark hair, she rained kisses upon it.

But Lygia slept on calmly, as if at her own home, under the care of Pomponia, and she slept long. It was past noon when she opened her blue eyes and began to look with astonishment about the bed chamber. Evidently she was surprised that she was not in the house of Aulus.

"Is it thee, Actea?" said she at last, seeing in the darkness the face of the Grecian.

"Yes, Lygia."

"Is it evening?"

"No, my child, but noon has passed."

"Has not Ursus returned?"

"Ursus did not promise to return. He said that he would watch with the Christians for the litter."

"True."

They left the bedroom and went to the bath, where Actea bathed Lygia; then they breakfasted together, and the Grecian conducted Lygia to the gardens of the palace, there being no danger, as Caesar and his guests were still asleep. For the first time in her life Lygia beheld these beautiful gardens, full of cypresses, pines, oak, olive and myrtle trees, amid which arose a veritable population of white, motionless statues. Mirror-like streams gleamed brightly; groves of roses were in bloom, sprinkled with the spray of fountains; entrances to picturesque grottoes were overgrown with ivy and vines; silver-colored swans floated on the waters; amid statues and

trees wandered gazelles from the deserts of Africa, and bright-plumed birds from all the known regions of the world.

The gardens were empty, save that here and there slaves were digging and chanting in undertones, and others, enjoying a recess, were sitting on the banks of the streams or beneath the shade of oaks, in the quivering light that broke in between the leaves, and others again were watering the roses or the pale, lily-colored crocus blossoms.

Actea and Lygia walked for some time, taking in all the wonders of the gardens, and though the mind of Lygia was disturbed with other thoughts, she was too much of a child to resist the pleasure, curiosity and wonder raised by the scene. She thought that if Caesar were only good he might live very happily in such a palace and such gardens. Somewhat tired at length, the two friends sat down on a bench almost hidden by cypresses, and talked of what weighed most on their minds—Lygia's flight in the evening. Actea was far less hopeful of success than Lygia. At times it seemed to her a wild and impossible project. Her pity for Lygia increased. It seemed to her that it would be much safer to appeal to the mercy of Vinitius. She questioned Lygia as to how long she had known Vinitius, and whether he could not be persuaded to return her to Pomponia. But Lygia shook her head. "No," she said, "in the house of Aulus he was very different; he was kind, but since last night's feast I fear him, and I prefer to flee to the Lygians."

"But," inquired Actea, "thou didst like him in the house of Aulus?"

"Yes," answered Lygia, hanging her head.

"Thou wert not a slave, as I was," said Actea, meditatively. "Vinitius might marry thee. Thou art a hostage, and the daughter of a king. Aulus and Pomponia love thee as their own child. They will, without a doubt, adopt thee. Vinitius may marry thee."

But Lygia answered, in a low, sad voice:

"I would rather fly to the Lygians."

"Dost thou wish me to go to Vinitius, awaken him if

he sleeps, and tell him what I have just told thee? Hearken, my dear, I will go to him and say: 'Vinitius, Lygia is the daughter of a king, and a beloved child of Aulus. If thou lovest her, return her to the house of Aulus, and from that house take her as a wife.'"

But the maiden repeated, in a voice so low that Actea could scarcely hear it:

"I would rather fly to the Lygians."

Further conversation was interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps. Before Actea could see who was coming, Poppaea Sabina made her appearance, with a small retinue of women slaves. Two of them held over her head bunches of ostrich feathers fastened to golden wires. These served both as fans and as a protection against the sun. Before Poppaea, an Egyptian woman, black as ebony, with breasts swollen from milk, bore in her arms a child, wrapt in purple fringed with golden embroidery. Actea and Lygia rose. They had expected that Poppaea would pass without paying any attention to them. But she stopped in front of them and said:

"Actea, the bells sewn by thee on the doll were poorly fastened, and the child tore one of them off and put it into her mouth; fortunately Lilith noticed it in season."

"Pardon me, O Divine one!" answered Actea, crossing her hands on her breast and bowing her head.

Poppaea gazed at Lygia, and inquired: "What slave is this?"

"She is no slave, Oh Divine Augusta, but a foster-child of Pomponia Graecina and the daughter of a Lygian king, whom he surrendered as a hostage to Rome."

"Has she come to visit thee?"

"No, Augusta, since the day before yesterday, she has been staying in the palace."

"Was she at the banquet last night?"

"She was, Augusta."

"At whose command?"

"At Caesar's command."

Poppaea gazed more attentively at Lygia. The

maiden stood with bowed head, raising her bright eyes to her with curiosity, and now dropping them again. A frown appeared on the brow of Augusta. Jealously guarding her beauty and power, she lived in constant dread lest some fortunate rival might destroy her as she had destroyed Octavia. Therefore every beautiful face that appeared in the palace excited her suspicion. With a critical eye Poppaea scrutinized Lygia's form, took in every feature at a glance, and became frightened. She is a nymph, thought she, and Venus, herself, must have given her birth. Suddenly a new thought came to her, which never before had occurred to her mind at sight of a beautiful woman, the thought that she herself was growing old. Wounded vanity and alarm seized Poppaea, many fears flashed through her mind. What might happen if Caesar met this maiden during the daytime in the sunlight? She was not a slave, but the daughter of a king. A barbarian, it is true, but still a king. "Immortal gods! She is as beautiful as I, and younger!" The frown on her brow deepened. Beneath their golden lashes her eyes shone with an evil light. Turning to Lygia, she asked, in a calm voice:

"Hast thou spoken with Caesar?"

"No, Augusta."

"Why dost thou prefer to be here rather than in the house of Aulus?"

"It is not my choice, lady. Petronius induced Caesar to take me from Pomponia. I am here against my will."

"Dost thou wish to return to Pomponia?"

This question Poppaea asked in a softer and milder voice, and Lygia's heart bounded with a new hope.

"Lady," she said, stretching out her hand, "Caesar promised to give me to Vinitius as a slave. Pray intercede for me and return me to Pomponia."

"Then it was Petronius who induced Caesar to take thee from Aulus and give thee to Vinitius?"

"Yes, lady, Vinitius will send for me to-day; but thou art kind, have pity on me!"

She knelt and, seizing the border of Poppaea's robe, awaited an answer with a beating heart. Poppaea looked at her a moment. Her face lit up with a malicious smile.

"I promise," she said, "that thou to-day wilt become the slave of Vinitius."

Then she went her way, fair as a dream, but evil. To the ears of Lygia and Actea came only the wail of the infant, who began to cry without any apparent reason.

Lygia's eyes, also, dimmed with tears. But she took Actea's hand and said:

"Let us return. Help is to be hoped for only from whence it can come."

They returned to Actea's apartments, where they remained until evening. When darkness fell and the slaves brought in lighted torches, the faces of both women were pale. At every moment their conversation was interrupted. They both listened to hear if any one were approaching. Lygia said, repeatedly, that, though grieved to part with Actea, she preferred that all should end to-day, for Ursus without doubt was waiting for her in the darkness. Her breathing grew quicker from emotion and alarm. Actea hurriedly collected all the gems she could find, and, fastening them in a corner of Lygia's robe, begged her to accept these gifts as an aid to escape. At times there fell a deep silence, interrupted by deceptive sounds. It seemed to both that, at one time, there was a noise behind the curtain, then again the distant cry of an infant arose, and now they seemed to hear the barking of dogs.

Suddenly the curtain of the ante-chamber was thrust aside. A tall dark man, his face pitted with small-pox, glided like a phantom into the chamber. Lygia, at the first glance, recognized Atacinus, one of Vinitius's freedmen, whom she had seen at the house of Aulus. Actea screamed. Atacinus bowed his head and said:

"Vinitius greets the divine Lygia and bids her to come to a feast in his house, which he has adorned with green."

The lips of the maiden grew white.

"I go," said she.

Then in farewell she threw herself into the arms of Actea.

CHAPTER X

The house of Vinitius was, in fact, adorned with the green of myrtle and ivy, garlands of which hung on the walls and doors. The columns were wreathed about with grape vine. The great hall, whose entrance was covered with a purple woolen cloth, as a protection from the cool night air, was as clear as daylight. Lamps of eight or twelve flames were burning. These took the forms of vessels, trees, birds or statues, with flames jutting from receivers full of perfumed oil. They were made of alabaster, or gilded Corinthian bronze, not so beautiful as the famous lamp from the temple of Apollo which Nero possessed, but nevertheless with a beauty of their own, fashioned as they all had been by celebrated masters. In some the lights were shaded by Alexandrian glass, or a transparent stuff from India of red, blue, yellow, or violet color, so that the entire hall was filled with many colored rays. The air was heavy with the odor of tuberoses, to which Vinitius had become accustomed while living in the Orient. The entire house, through which moved male and female slaves, was brilliant with lights. The table in the banquet room was laid for four persons, for, besides Vinitius and Lygia, Petronius and Chrysothemis were to attend the feast. Vinitius had taken the advice of Petronius, not to go for Lygia himself, but to send Atacinus with the permission accorded by Caesar, and receive her in his own home, himself, with friendliness and even with marks of special consideration.

"Thou wert intoxicated yesterday," said Petronius. "I had my eyes on thee. Thou didst behave to her like a quarryman from the Alban hills. Be not so rough, and remember that good wine should be drunk slowly.

Know, too, that to desire is sweet, but to be desired is sweeter."

Chrysothemis had a different opinion, but Petronius, calling her his vestal and his dove, began to explain the difference which must exist between an experienced charioteer and a youth who holds the reins for the first time. Then, turning to Vinitius, he said:

"Win her confidence, make her happy, treat her with magnanimity. I care not to be present at a gloomy feast. Swear to her, even by Hades, that thou wilt return her to Pomponia, then see to it that to-morrow she prefers to remain in thy house." Pointing to Chrysothemis, he added: "For five years I acted thus with this flighty dove and I cannot complain of her obduracy."

Chrysothemis coquettishly tapped him with her fan of peacock feathers, and said:

"Did I not resist thee, Satyr?"

"Out of regard for my predecessor."

"But wert thou not at my feet?"

"To put rings on thy toes."

Chrysothemis looked involuntarily at her feet, on the toes of which jewels actually glittered. Both she and Petronius laughed. Vinitius did not listen to their banter. His heart was beating uneasily under the splendidly decorated robe of a Syrian priest which he had donned for Lygia's reception.

"They must have left the palace already," said he, as if speaking to himself.

"They must," said Petronius in confirmation. "In the meantime shall I tell you about the predictions of Apollonius, of Tyana, or shall I relate the history of Ruffinus, which I have not finished, I know not why."

Vinitius was interested, neither in Apollonius nor in Ruffinus. He could not take his mind from Lygia. Though he felt it was more befitting to receive her at home than to go to the palace, as if he wished to take her by force, still he regretted that he had not gone, for then he would have seen her sooner and could have sat in the darkness by her side in a double litter.

Meanwhile slaves brought in a tripod, ornamented with rams' heads, and bronze dishes filled with live coals, over which they sprinkled pieces of myrrh and nard.

"Now they are turning towards the Carinae," said Vinitius again to himself.

"He has not the patience to wait, he will run to meet them, and will probably miss them," exclaimed Chrysothemis.

Vinitius smiled in an embarrassed manner and said: "I have patience and I will wait."

He dilated his nostrils and panted. Seeing this Petronius shrugged his shoulders and said:

"There is not a farthing's worth of philosophy in him; I shall never succeed in making a man of this son of Mars."

But Vinitius did not even hear his words. "They are already in the Carinae," he murmured.

Indeed, the litter in which Lygia lay was really turning towards the Carinae. The lamp-bearers were in front; the carriers were on both sides of the litter. Atacinus followed just behind them. They moved slowly, for the streets were not lighted and the lanterns hardly sufficed to show the way. The street was uncommonly crowded; almost from every turning people poured out in groups without torches or lamps and clad in dark mantles. Some of them mingled with the slaves accompanying the litter. Others, in greater numbers, approached from the opposite direction. Some staggered, as if drunk, and for some moments the advance grew so difficult that the lamp-bearers began to shout:

"Make way for the noble tribune, Marcus Vinitius!"

Lygia, throwing aside the curtain, looked upon these people clad in dark mantles, and trembled with emotion. Hope and fear mingled in her breast. "That is he! That is Ursus and the Christians! The struggle will begin soon," she murmured, with quivering lips. "Help me, O Christ, save me!"

Atacinus, who at first had not noticed the uncommon

animation in the streets, now became alarmed. Something unusual was taking place. The lamp-bearers had to keep up their shouting:

"Make way for the litter of the noble tribune!"

From all sides unknown people had crowded around the litter to such an extent that Atacinus ordered the slaves to drive them away with clubs.

Suddenly, a cry rang out. Immediately all the lights were extinguished. Around the litter a confused struggle began.

Atacinus perceived that an attack had been made upon the litter. This frightened him. It was known to all that Caesar, with a crowd of attendants, frequently amused himself with such attacks in the Suburra and in other parts of the city. It was known that Nero sometimes returned from these nocturnal adventures with black and blue spots. But those who defended themselves were condemned to death, even if of senatorial rank. The quarters of the guards, whose duty it was to preserve order in the city, were not far away, but, on such occasions, the guards feigned to be deaf and blind.

Meantime, the struggle thickened about the litter; people struck and trampled upon one another. It flashed upon Atacinus that he had best save Lygia and himself and leave the rest to their fate. Drawing the maiden from the litter, he took her in his arms and attempted to escape in the darkness.

But Lygia began to shout: "Ursus, Ursus!"

She had left the palace in a white robe, hence she was plainly visible. Atacinus, with his free arm, was just covering her with his mantle, when, suddenly, terrible claws were dug into his neck and a crushing mass, like a stone, came down upon his head. He dropped, in a twinkling, as an ox might drop beneath the butt-end of an axe, before an altar of Jove.

Most of the slaves were already lying on their backs. The rest had scattered in the darkness. On the spot only the broken litter remained. Ursus bore Lygia to the

Suburra, his companions following him and dispersing gradually at the street corners.

The slaves began soon to assemble before the house of Vinitius, and stood there debating. Not daring to enter, they decided to return to the scene of the attack, where they found a few dead bodies, among them that of Atacinus. He was still quivering, but after a moment of violent convulsion he expired.

The slaves lifted him up and carried him towards the house of Vinitius, but they stopped at the gate, dreading to inform their master of what had happened.

"Let Gulo be our spokesman," whispered a few voices; "his face is bloody, as are ours, and our master loves him; he runs less risk than any of us."

Gulo, a German slave, who had nursed Vinitius, and who had descended to him from his mother, the sister of Petronius, said:

"I will inform him. But let us all go in together. Let not his wrath descend on my head alone."

Meantime the patience of Vinitius was exhausted. Petronius and Chrysothemis ridiculed him as he walked with quick steps up and down the room, repeating:

"They should be here already; they should be here already."

He would have gone out to meet them, but Petronius and Chrysothemis held him back.

Suddenly steps were heard in the vestibule, and into the hall there rushed a crowd of slaves, who began to utter mourning cries.

"Aaaa!—aa!"

Vinitius rushed towards them.

"Where is Lygia?" he cried, in a strange and terrible voice.

"Aaaa!—aa!"

Then Gulo came forward, the blood streaming down his face. In a trembling voice he exclaimed:

"Behold our blood, master! We defended her. Behold blood, master, blood!"

But, ere he could finish, Vinitius seized a bronze lamp, and with one blow shattered his skull; then, clutching his own head with both hands, he tore his hair, and repeated, in a hoarse voice:

"Woe is me! Woe is me!"

His face grew livid, his eyes started from his head, and foam appeared at his mouth.

"Whips!" he roared, in a terrible voice.

"Master, Aaaa—aa! Have mercy on us!" implored the slaves.

Petronius arose, an expression of disgust upon his face.

"Let us go, Chrysothemis," he said. "If thou wishest to look upon raw flesh, I will command a butcher's stall to be opened in the Carinae."

And he left the room. Throughout all the house, hung with ivy and prepared for feasting, there rang groans and the whistling of whips. These sounds lasted almost until the morning.

CHAPTER XI

Vinitius sought not his couch that night. Some time after the departure of Petronius, as the groans of the slaves undergoing flagellation could appease neither his grief nor his anger, he collected a crowd of slaves, and, though it was late at night, he led them forth in search of Lygia. He searched the Esquiline district, the Suburra, the criminal quarter, and all the adjoining by-lanes. Then, passing the Capitol, he crossed the bridge of Fabricius to the island, and thence passed hurriedly through the trans-Tiber district. But search was in vain. He himself had little hope of finding Lygia, only he felt he must do something during that terrible night. He returned home at daybreak, when the carts and mules of the vegetable dealers had already

appeared in the streets, and when bakers were opening their shops.

On his return he ordered the removal of Gulo's corpse, which nobody had dared to touch. The slaves who had escorted Lygia he sent to rural dungeons, a punishment considered more terrible even than death. Throwing himself, at last, on a couch in the banqueting hall, he pondered confused plans of how he could find and seize Lygia.

He could not bear the thought that he would not see Lygia again. The very idea threw him into a frenzy. Imperious by nature, the young soldier, for the first time in his life, met resistance, met another unyielding will, and he could not understand how any one could dare to thwart his desires. Vinitius would rather the entire world should perish and Rome fall into ruins than that he should fail to attain the object of his desires. The cup of joy had been snatched from his lips, therefore it seemed to him that an unprecedented something had happened—something that cried aloud for vengeance to all laws, divine and human.

He could not reconcile himself to fate. Never in his life had he desired anything so keenly as Lygia. He felt that he could not live without her. He could not imagine what he would do on the morrow without her, how he could survive the days that were to come. At times he was transported by fits of rage against her. He wanted to possess her, to drag her by the hair to his bed room, and there to gloat over her; and then again his heart was stirred by a yearning for her form, her eyes, her voice, and he felt that he would gladly fall at her feet. He called to her, he gnawed his fingers, he clasped his head with his hands. He strove to compel himself to think calmly about continuing his search, but he could not. A thousand plans flitted through his head, one more foolish than the other. Then it occurred to him that it must have been Aulus who had rescued the maiden, and that Aulus must know where she was concealed. He sprang up to rush off at once to the house of Aulus.

If Aulus would not return Lygia to him—if he did not fear his threats—then he would go to Caesar, accuse the old general of disobedience, and prevail upon Nero to condemn him to death. But, previous to this, he would compel the old man to reveal Lygia's hiding place. Even if she were returned voluntarily, he would be revenged. True, he had been sheltered in the house of Aulus, he had been taken care of—but what of that? This insult had freed him from his debt of gratitude.

In imagination the young tribune revelled in the despair of Pomponia when the centurion should bring the death sentence to old Aulus. He was certain that he could secure it. Petronius would assist him; besides, Caesar denied nothing to his intimates, the Augustales, unless the request were antagonistic to his own desires or wishes.

Suddenly his heart almost died within him under the influence of a terrible thought.

Suppose Caesar himself had taken Lygia?

It was generally known that Caesar, to relieve his ennui, sought amusement by making night attacks. Even Petronius used to take a hand in them. The main object of these escapades was to seize women and toss them on a soldier's blanket until they lost consciousness. Caesar at times called these adventures "pearl hunts," for it sometimes happened that in densely populated districts they found a real pearl of youth and beauty. Then the sagacio (the term for this sport) was turned into an actual carrying off. The "pearl" was sent either to the Palatine Palace or to one of Caesar's numerous villas, or else Caesar presented the jewel to one of his intimates. Such a fate might have befallen Lygia. Caesar had seen her at the feast. Vinitius had no doubt that he must have thought her the most beautiful woman he had ever beheld. It was all clear enough now. True, Lygia had been in the Palatine Palace, and Caesar might have kept her openly; but Caesar, as Petronius truly said, had no courage in wrong-doing; having the power to act openly, he preferred to do his ill deeds in secret. In this case fear lest he should betray himself to Poppaea had prob-

ably influenced him to act secretly. It now occurred to Vinitius that Aulus and Pomponia would not have dared to rescue the girl given to him by Caesar. Who, indeed, would dare to do this? Would that gigantic Lygian who had entered the banquet hall and had boldly taken her from the feast on his arm? But where could he hide her? No, a slave could not have done this deed. Hence, no one had taken Lygia except Caesar himself.

At this thought darkness fell about his eyes and his forehead was bedewed with sweat. If this be the case, then Lygia was lost to him forever.

It was possible for him to wrest her from the hands of any one else, but not from those of Caesar. Now, with all the more reason, he could exclaim: "Woe, woe be unto me!" His imagination, allowing him no rest, pictured Lygia in the arms of Nero, and, for the first time in his life, he comprehended that there are thoughts that are beyond human endurance. Lygia's image haunted his mind as the past flashes through the memory of a drowning man. He saw her, and heard every word that she uttered —saw her at the fountain, at the house of Aulus, at the banquet. Again he felt her presence, the fragrance of her hair, the warmth of her body, the sweetness of the kisses which he had imprinted upon her innocent lips. She appeared to him a hundredfold more beautiful than ever, more desirable and dearer to his heart, surpassing all mortal women and all goddesses. And when he thought that all that had so deeply stirred his heart, and had become mingled with his very blood and life, was now possessed by Nero, he was seized with a purely physical pain, so terrible that he wished to dash his brains out against the walls of the chamber. He felt that he was losing his mind, and he would surely have gone mad but for the hope of vengeance. Hitherto he had thought that he could not live without Lygia. Now he was determined that he would not die until he had avenged her. He found relief in this thought. "I will be thy Cassius, O Caesar!" he repeated to himself, addressing Nero in his mind. After a time he dug his hands into a flower pot,

and squeezing a handful of earth together, he vowed to Erebus, Hecate, and his household lares, that he would avenge the spiriting away of Lygia.

And he was in a measure consoled. Now at least he had something to live for—something with which to occupy his days and nights. Abandoning his intention of visiting Aulus, Vinitius gave orders that he should be borne to the Palatine. On the way he decided that should he not be admitted to Caesar's presence, or should they search him for concealed weapons, it would be a proof that Caesar had carried away Lygia. He took no weapon with him. He had lost his usual presence of mind in general, yet, as is not uncommon with people possessed by a single idea, he retained it in all things which concerned his revenge. He acted with great haste, in order that his thirst for vengeance should not weaken before he had slaked it. He desired, above everything, to see Actea, for from her he hoped to learn the truth. At times, also, he was consoled with the hope that he might see Lygia, and this thought made him tremble. If Caesar had taken her from the slaves, not knowing who she was, he might return her to him on that day. But he soon threw aside this idea. Had Caesar wished to return her to him, he would have sent her on the previous evening. Actea alone could explain everything to him. He would go to her first of all.

Having determined on this course of action, he commanded his litter-bearers to make all speed. On the way his thoughts were disconnected, dwelling now on Lygia, now on his plans for revenge. He had heard that priests of the Egyptian goddess Pacht could bring on disease as they pleased, and he determined to learn their secret from them. In the Orient he had been informed, also, that the Jews knew certain invocations by means of which they covered the bodies of their enemies with ulcers. In his household he had about a score of Jewish slaves. He decided that on his return he would have them flogged until they gave up the secret. But with a special delight he thought of the short Roman sword which let out streams

of blood such as had run from Caius Caligula, and left indelible stains on the columns of the portico. He was ready to bathe all Rome in blood. Had some revengeful gods promised him to destroy all mankind save himself and Lygia, he would even have agreed to that. In front of the arch of the Palatine Palace he recovered his presence of mind. At sight of the pretorian guards he thought that if they tried even in the slightest way to detain him this would be a proof that Lygia was in the palace by the will of Caesar. To his surprise, the chief centurion smiled at him in a friendly way, and approaching him, said:

"Greetings, noble Tribune. If thou desire an audience with Caesar, thou hast chosen an inopportune time. I do not think that thou wilt be able to see him."

"What has happened?" asked Vinitius.

"The divine little Augusta was suddenly taken ill yesterday. Caesar and Poppaea are at her bedside with physicians whom they have summoned from all parts of the city."

This was a matter of importance. When the infant was born Caesar had became almost insane from joy and received her with divine honors. Even before the birth the Senate had solemnly committed it to the guardianship of the gods. After the birth splendid games were celebrated and a temple was erected to the two Fortunes. Nero, extreme in everything, loved the child beyond measure. It was dear also to Poppaea, if only for this reason, that it strengthened her position and made her influence irresistible. On the health and life of this infant might depend the fate of the whole Empire. But Vinitius was so carried away with his love, that, paying no attention to the news, he answered: "I only wish to see Actea."

But Actea also was in attendance upon the child, and Vinitius had to wait long before seeing her. She came only about noon, with a pale and weary face, which paled still more at sight of Vinitius.

"Actea," cried he, seizing her hand and drawing her to the middle of the room, "where is Lygia?"

"I was going to ask thee concerning her," she answered, reproachfully.

Though he had determined to question her calmly, Vinitius now clasped his head in his hands, while his face grew distorted with grief and anger, and he said: "She has disappeared. She was seized on the way to my house."

Then he grew calmer, and, bringing his face close to Actea's, he hissed through his teeth:

"Actea—if thy life is dear to thee, if thou desirest not to be the cause of unimaginable misfortunes, tell me the truth: did Caesar take her?"

"Caesar was not away from the palace yesterday."

"By the shade of thy mother, in the name of all the gods, is she not hidden in the palace?"

"Marcus, by the shade of my mother, she is not in the palace and Caesar did not take her. The infant Augusta has been sick since yesterday and Caesar has not left her cradle."

Vinitius breathed more freely. What had seemed to him the most terrible of possibilities was removed from his path.

"Then," said he, sitting on the bench and clenching his fists, "Aulus and Pomponia have taken her—woe to them."

"Aulus Plautius was here this morning. I could not see him because I was busy with the infant, but he made inquiries of Epaphroditus and other servants of the palace concerning Lygia and told them he would come again to see me."

"He wished to avert suspicion from himself. If he really knew not what had become of Lygia he would have sought her in my house."

"He left a few words for me on a tablet. These will show thee that Aulus, knowing Caesar had taken Lygia from him at the request of thyself and of Petronius, feared that the maiden had been sent to thy house. This morning he went there, and was informed of what had happened."

With these words Actea went to the bedroom and returned with the tablet which Aulus had left for her.

Vinitius read it and became silent. Actea, guessing his thoughts from the gloomy expression of his face, said:

"No, Marcus, what Lygia herself desired, has happened."

"Didst thou know that she desired to escape?" exclaimed Vinitius, wrathfully.

Fixing her sad eyes upon him she answered, almost sternly:

"I knew that she would not become thy concubine."

"And thou, what hast thou been all thy life?"

"I was first of all a slave."

But the anger of Vinitius could not be calmed. Caesar had given Lygia to him, consequently he did not need to inquire what had been her previous condition. He would find her even if she were hidden in the bowels of the earth, and he would do what he pleased with her; she should be his slave. He would have her flogged as often as he pleased. When he ceased to love her he would bestow her on the lowest of his slaves, or he would send her to turn a handmill on his African estates. He would begin his search for her at once, and find her that he might punish her, that he might trample upon her and compel her obedience.

As his anger grew he placed no limits to his vengeance, so that even Actea perceived that he was threatening more than he could perform, under the influence of anger and despair. She would probably have felt pity for his sufferings had not his extravagant rage exhausted her patience, so that at last she inquired why he had come to her.

Vinitius did not find an immediate answer. He had come to her because he had wanted to come, because he thought she would give him some information; but really he had come to see Caesar, but not being admitted to him he had asked for her. Lygia's flight had been disobedience to the will of Caesar. Therefore he would petition

Nero to give command that she should he sought over the whole city and over the entire Empire, even if this entailed the aid of all the legions and the searching of every house throughout the Empire. Petronius would support this petition, and the search would begin at once.

"Beware," said Actea, "lest when she is found thou lose her forever at the command of Caesar."

"What dost thou mean?" Vinitius asked, with wrinkled brows.

"Listen to me, Marcus, yesterday I was walking with Lygia in the gardens; we met Poppaea with the infant Augusta, borne by the Egyptian, Lilith. At evening the infant fell ill. Lilith declares that the child was bewitched. She accuses the foreign woman whom they met in the gardens. If the child recovers they will forget all about this, but if not Poppaea will be the first to accuse Lygia of witchcraft, and then whenever she is found nothing can save her."

There was a moment of silence, which Vinitius was the first to break.

"Perhaps she did bewitch the child and has bewitched me."

"Lilith says that the child began to cry immediately after she had passed us. This is true in fact. No doubt the child was ill when they brought it into the garden. Marcus, search for Lygia wherever thou pleasest, but until the little one recovers mention not her name to Caesar, or thou wilt bring down upon her the vengeance of Poppaea. Her eyes have shed tears enough already on thy account. May all the gods protect her now."

"Dost thou love her, Actea?" asked Vinitius sadly.

Tears sprang to the eyes of the freedwoman.

"Yes, I love her."

"But she did not repay thee with hatred as she did me."

Actea looked at him as if hesitating, or as if she wished to test his sincerity. Then she said:

"Oh, blind and passionate man, she loved thee."

Vinitius sprang up as if possessed. "That is false," he said, "she hates me."

How could Actea know? It was hardly possible that Lygia, after one day's acquaintance, would make such a confession to her. What kind of love was that which would prefer wandering, poverty, the uncertainty of the morrow, perhaps even a shameful death, to a house bedecked with green wreaths where a lover was in waiting with a banquet all prepared? Better he should not hear such words lest he go mad. He would not have exchanged the girl for all the treasures of the Palatine—and she had fled. What kind of love was that that feared delight and courted pain? Who could understand it? Who could explain it? But for his hope of finding her he would fall upon his sword. Love surrenders, it does not run away. There were moments in the house of Aulus when he felt that happiness was near, but now he was convinced that she hated him, and would die with that hatred in her heart.

Actea, naturally gentle and timid, now burst forth with indignant reproaches. How had he tried to win the love of Lygia? Instead of asking Aulus and Pomponia to give her to him, he had taken her away from her guardians by stealth. He wished not to make her his wife but his concubine, she, the foster daughter of an honorable family and the daughter of a king. He had brought her to an abode of vice and infamy, he had defiled her innocent eyes with the spectacle of a shameful orgy, he had treated her as a harlot. Had he forgotten what sort of man was Aulus and what sort of woman Pomponia, they, who had brought up Lygia? Had he not wit enough to understand that women existed quite different from Nigidia or Calvia Crispinilla or Poppaea, and from all those whom he met in Caesar's house? Had not a conviction forced itself upon his mind at his first sight of Lygia that so pure a soul would prefer death to shame? Did he not know that the gods she worshipped were better and purer than the dissolute Venus, or Isis, who were honored by the corrupt women of Rome? No, Lygia had made no confession to her. But she had said that she hoped Vinitius would save her; she hoped Caesar, through Vinitius's

petition, would allow her to return home; she hoped that Vinitius would restore her to Pomponia. While speaking Lygia had become confused, as a maiden who loves and trusts. Her heart had beat for him but he had terrified her and made her indignant—and now let him seek for her with the aid of Caesar's cohorts, but let him know that should Nero's child die, suspicion must fall upon her and her ruin would be inevitable.

In spite of his rage and pain what Actea had said affected Vinitius. Her assurance that Lygia loved him thrilled him to the very soul. He recalled how she had blushed and how her eyes had become radiant with light when she had listened to his words in the house of Aulus. Yes, at that time love was touching her heart. The thought filled him with delight, and then he saw that he might have won her through peaceful means and have possessed himself of her heart. She might have put twine on his door, rubbed it with wolf's fat, and sat as his wife on a sheepskin by his hearth. He might have heard from her lips the words sanctioned by custom: "Where thou art, Caius, there am I, Caia," and she might have belonged to him forever. Why had he not acted thus? Did he not wish to marry her? Now that she had gone, now that he might never find her, or, finding her, might cause her ruin. Or even if he did not bring ruin upon her, neither Lygia nor Aulus might listen to his proposals.

Again anger seized him. But it was now turned, not against Aulus or Pomponia, or Lygia, but against Petronius. He was the one at fault. Had it not been for him Lygia would not be wandering about now. She would be his bride and no danger would threaten her life. Now all was over; matters could no longer be mended. Now it was too late. An abyss seemed to yawn at his feet. What was he to do, what measures could he take? Like an echo Actea repeated the words, "too late." Falling from another's lips they sounded like a death sentence. One thing, however, was certain. He must find Lygia, otherwise some terrible evil would befall him. Mechanically wrapping himself in his toga he was on the point of

leaving without even bidding farewell to Actea, when suddenly the curtain that separated the vestibule from the hall was thrust aside, and he saw before him the sad face of Pomponia.

Evidently she also had heard of Lygia's disappearance, and, judging that she could easily gain admittance to Actea, she had come for information.

Seeing Vinitius she turned toward him her pale, delicate face and exclaimed:

"Marcus, may God forgive thee the wrong thou hast done to us and to Lygia."

He hung his head, feeling both unhappy and guilty, yet not understanding what God was to forgive, nor why Pomponia spoke of forgiveness when she ought to have spoken of revenge.

At length he departed, tormented by sad thoughts, despair and perplexity.

In the court yard and in the gallery were crowds of people. Mingled with slaves of the Palace were knights and Senators come to inquire after the health of the little Augusta, and at the same time to show themselves in the Palace and give a proof of their devotion in the presence of Caesar's slaves. The news of the illness of the little divinity had evidently spread quickly, for every moment visitors arrived, and through the archways crowds of people could be seen. Some of the recent arrivals noticing Vinitius coming out of the Palace stopped him for news, but he hurried on without answering them, until he ran against Petronius.

Doubtless Vinitius would have been seized with rage at sight of Petronius and committed some unlawful act in Caesar's Palace, were it not that when he had left Actea's chamber he was so crushed and humiliated that for the moment his innate irascibility had left him. Vinitius pushed Petronius aside and was about to continue his way but the latter detained him.

"How fares the divine infant?"

This forcible detention aroused anew the anger of Vinitius.

"May Hell swallow her and all this house," he hissed through his teeth.

"Be silent, unhappy man," said Petronius, and, looking about, he hastily added: "If thou desirest to learn something about Lygia, follow me. No, I will say nothing here! Follow me, I will explain my surmises in the litter."

Placing his arm about the young man, he led him out of the Palace as quickly as possible. This was his aim, for he had no news whatever about Lygia. But as a man of resources, who, in spite of yesterday's indignation felt compassion for Vinitius, together with a certain responsibility for what had happened, he had taken some measures already. When they were seated in the litter he said:

"I have ordered my slaves to watch at every gate, giving them minute descriptions of the maiden and of that giant who carried her out from Caesar's feast, for doubtless he is the one who recaptured her from thy slaves. Hearken! Aulus and Pomponia may have wished to hide her away on one of their estates. If so we will find in what direction she was conducted. If she passes none of the gates, then this will be proof that she is still in the city, and we will begin to search for her in Rome to-day."

"Aulus and Pomponia know not where she is," answered Vinitius.

"Art thou sure of that?"

"I have seen Pomponia, and she also is searching for her."

"She could not have left the city yesterday, for the gates are closed at night. Two of my slaves are watching each gate; one is to follow Lygia and the giant and the other is to return immediately and inform me. If she be in Rome we shall find her, for the Lygian can easily be recognized by his height and the breadth of his shoulders. It is lucky that she was not carried away by Caesar. I can assure you that it was not he, for I know all the secrets of the Palace."

Vinitius broke out rather in sorrow than in anger. In a voice broken by emotion, he told Petronius all he had

heard from Actea. He explained the new dangers which threatened Lygia, that now, in case they found her, they must needs hide her from Poppaea. Then he reproached Petronius bitterly for his advice. Had it not been for him, everything would have been well. Lygia would have been in the house of Aulus, Vinitius could have seen her every day, and he would now be a happier man than Caesar. Carried away by his own words, he became more and more agitated, until at last tears of sorrow and anger coursed down his cheeks.

Petronius, who had not thought the young Tribune capable of such passion, beholding his tears, said to himself with wonder:

"Oh, mighty sovereign of Cyprus, thou alone art the ruler of gods and men!"

CHAPTER XII

When they alighted before the house of Petronius, the chief of the hall informed him that none of the slaves sent to the gates had as yet returned. He had given orders that food should be brought them, and that on the penalty of a flogging they should carefully watch all who left the city.

"See!" said Petronius, "they are still within the city, and we cannot fail to find them. Give orders to thy slaves also that they watch the city gates, selecting those especially who formed Lygia's escort, for they will easily recognize her."

"I have given orders that those slaves should be sent to my country estates," answered Vinitius, "but I will recall my orders and send them to the gates."

When he had written a few words on a tablet covered with wax, he handed the tablet to Petronius, who ordered it sent immediately to the house of Vinitius. Then they entered the inner portico and, sitting on a marble bench, began to converse. The golden-haired Eunice and Iris

placed bronze footstools beneath their feet, and moving a table near the bench, poured wine into goblets out of beautiful, long-necked jars, imported from Volaterrae and Caecina.

"Do any of thy slaves know this gigantic Lygian?" asked Petronius.

"Only Atacinus and Gulo knew him; but Atacinus was killed beside the litter, and I slew Gulo."

"I am sorry for him," said Petronius. "He carried in his arms not only thee, but me also."

"I was going to free him," replied Vinitius. "But let that rest. Let us speak of Lygia. Rome is a sea—"

"A sea is a place in which to find pearls. We shall not find her to-day, of course, nor to-morrow, but sooner or later we shall find her. Just now thou didst reproach me for having advised thee to take the course which thou didst, but the advice in itself was good; it became bad because of unfavorable circumstances. Besides, thou thyself hast heard from Aulus that he intends to go to Sicily with all his family. So Lygia would in any event have been far away from thee."

"I should have followed her," replied Vinitius, "and in any case she would have been out of danger; but now if this infant dies, Poppaea will believe, and will persuade Caesar to believe, that Lygia caused the death."

"True; this thought has alarmed me also. But the little doll may get well. If it dies, we shall find some means of escape."

Petronius, after a moment's thought, added: "Poppaea, it is said, believes in the faith of the Jews, and in evil spirits. Caesar is superstitious. If we spread the rumor that Lygia has been carried away by evil spirits it will be believed, since neither Caesar nor Aulus have carried her off; therefore, it will be believed that she was spirited away. The Lygian could not have rescued her alone. It is evident that others helped him. But how could a slave collect so many people in a day?"

"In Rome slaves help one another."

"But some one pays for it with blood. True, they help

one another, but not when it is against the interest of other slaves. On this occasion it was known that your slaves would be held responsible and punished. If thou give thy slaves the idea of evil spirits, they will assert that they saw them with their own eyes, for this would justify them before thee. Ask any one of them if he did not see Lygia borne through the air, and he will swear at once by the Aegis of Zeus that this was just what happened."

Vinitius, who was himself superstitious, looked with awe at Petronius, and said:

"If Ursus could not get slaves to help him, and was not able to take her alone, who did take her?"

Petronius laughed. "See," said he; "how can they disbelieve if thou believest? Such is our world which laughs at the gods. All will believe, and cease searching for her, and meantime we will hide her in one of our villas."

"But who could have helped her?"

"Her co-religionists," answered Petronius.

"What co-religionists? What deity do they worship? I ought to know better than thou."

"Nearly every Roman woman worships a different deity. Doubtless Pomponia has brought up Lygia to worship the deity which she adores, but what deity this is I do not know. One thing is certain—no one has seen her make offerings to any god in our temples. She has been accused even of being a Christian, but this is not possible; a secret investigation cleared her from this charge. It is said that Christians not only worship the head of an ass, but that they are enemies of the human race, and that they revel in the most terrible crimes. Consequently Pomponia cannot be a Christian, for she is a good woman. Were she a hater of humanity she would not treat her slaves so kindly."

"In no house are they so well treated as in that of Aulus," added Vinitius.

"Pomponia told me of a God who was one, powerful, and merciful. What she has done with all the other gods is her affair. But this Logos of hers cannot be very

powerful, or, rather, he must be a poor kind of a God if He is worshipped only by Pomponia and Lygia and Ursus. It may be that there are more adherents of this God, and they assisted Lygia."

"Their faith commands forgiveness," said Vinitius. "In Actea's chamber I met Pomponia, and she said to me, 'May God forgive you the wrong you have done to Lygia and to us.'"

"Evidently their God is a very mild being. Let Him forgive thee, then, and as a sign of His forgiveness let Him restore the maiden to thee."

"I would offer him a hecatomb to-morrow! I have desire neither for food nor sleep nor for the bath. I shall put on dark raiment and wander through the city. Perhaps I shall find her in disguise. I am sick."

Petronius gazed at him compassionately. There were dark streaks beneath the eyes of Vinitius; his pupils were bright with fever; his unshaven beard made a bluish shade over his jaw; his hair was disordered; he looked indeed like a sick man. Iris and the golden-haired Eunice gazed at him also with commiseration. But he seemed not to notice them. Neither he nor Petronius paid any more attention to the presence of the slave women than if they were dogs moving about the room.

"Thou art feverish," said Petronius.

"Yes."

"Hearken! I know not what a physician would prescribe for thee, but I know what I would do in thy place. Till Lygia is found I would replace the lost one with a substitute. I have seen beautiful women in thy house. Contradict me not. I know what love is, and I know that if love is provoked by one woman another cannot satisfy it. Nevertheless, a beautiful slave will afford at least a temporary distraction."

"I do not wish it," replied Vinitius.

But Petronius, who was sincerely attached to him, and who was anxious to relieve his suffering, began to consider how this might best be done.

"Perhaps thy slaves do not possess for thee the charm

of novelty," said he. He glanced first at Iris, and then at Eunice. At last he laid his hand on the hip of the golden-haired Grecian and resumed: "Look at this nymph! But a few days ago the young Fonteius Capiton offered for her three beautiful boys from Clazomeme. Scopas himself has not chiselled a more beautiful form. I cannot tell why I have been cold to her, since thoughts of Chrysothemis have not restrained me. Here, I give her to thee; take her."

When the golden-haired Eunice heard these words she grew white as a sheet. Looking with frightened eyes at Vinitius, she seemed benumbed while she awaited his answer.

But the young soldier sprang up from the bench and, pressing his temples with his hands, began to speak hurriedly, as a man who, tormented by pain, does not wish to listen to any soothing words.

"No, no, I do not care for her, I do not care for any other woman. I thank thee, but I do not want her. I am going to search for Lygia throughout the city. Have a Gallic cloak with a hood brought to me. I shall go to the trans-Tiber. Oh, if I can succeed merely in seeing Ursus!"

Then he withdrew hurriedly. Petronius, seeing that he could not stay still in any one place, did not attempt to detain him. Taking his refusal as a manifestation of a temporary aversion for all women except Lygia, but wishing still to be generous, he said, turning to Eunice:

"Eunice, bathe thyself, anoint thy body with perfumes, then dress and go to the house of Vinitius."

The Grecian woman fell on her knees, and stretching out her hands, implored him not to send her away from his house. She would not go to Vinitius. She would prefer to carry wood to the furnaces of the baths of Petronius than to be the chief servant in that of Vinitius. She would not, she could not go. She implored him for pity. Let him have her flogged daily, but let him not send her away from his house.

Trembling like a leaf with fear and excitement, Eunice

extended her imploring hands to Petronius, who listened with astonishment. A slave woman who dared to answer a command with a prayer, declaring, "I will not and I cannot," was something so unheard of in Rome that Petronius could not believe his ears. Finally he frowned. He was too refined to be cruel. He gave more freedom to his slaves than other masters, demanding only that they should render good service and honor his will like that of a god. But if his slaves violated either of these requirements, Petronius had them punished in the usual fashion. Besides, he could not endure opposition or anything that ruffled his peace of mind. So he looked at the kneeling slave, and said:

"Call Tiresias, and return with him." She arose, trembling, with tears in her eyes, and retired, returning soon with the chief of the hall servants, the Cretan Tiresias.

"Take Eunice," said Petronius, "and give her twenty-five lashes, but in such a way as not to disfigure her skin."

Then he went into his library, and, sitting at the rose-colored marble table, he commenced work on his "Feast of Trimalchion." But Lygia's escape and the illness of the little Augusta distracted his thoughts so much that he did not work long. The important question at present was the illness of the infant. Petronius saw that if Caesar believed Lygia to have bewitched the young Augusta, the blame might fall on him also, for the maiden had been brought to the Palace at his request. But he hoped that as soon as he saw Caesar he would convince him of the absurdity of such a supposition. He relied somewhat also on a certain weakness which Poppaea had for him—a weakness which she had not succeeded in concealing from him. After a time he shrugged his shoulders, having convinced himself that his fears were groundless, and he decided to take his meal in the dining hall. After that he would go in his litter to the Palace, next to the Campus Martius, and finally to Chrysothemis. On his way to the dining hall, at the entrance to the corridor assigned to the slaves, Petronius noticed the shapely figure of Eunice. Forgetting that he had given no order

to Tiresias beyond that of flogging her, he frowned and looked around for that official. Not seeing Tiresias among the slaves, he turned to Eunice.

"Hast thou been flogged?"

"Yes, master, I have been flogged. Oh, yes, master."

Joy and gratitude blended in her voice. She evidently thought that the punishment had been given in place of sending her away from the house, and that now she might remain. Petronius, seeing this, marvelled at the passionate resistance of the slave; he was too deep a student in human nature not to understand that only love could call forth such resistance.

"Dost thou love some one in this house?"

She looked at him with her blue eyes dim with tears, and answered in a voice so low that it could scarcely be heard:

"Yes, master." Eunice, with her wonderful eyes, with her golden hair flowing down her back, with an expression of hope and fear upon her face, was so beautiful that Petronius, who, as a philosopher, recognized the power of love, and as an aesthete rendered homage to all beauty, felt pity for the slave.

"Whom of these dost thou love?" he inquired, turning towards the slaves.

No answer came. Eunice bent her head down to his very feet, and remained motionless as a statue.

Petronius looked around at the slaves, among whom were some beautiful and shapely youths. None of the faces explained anything to him; he saw only strange smiles. He looked again at Eunice, who was lying at his feet, and then went on in silence to the dining hall. When he had eaten, he gave orders that he should be carried to the Palace, and from there to Chrysothemis, where he remained until late in the night. On his return he summoned Tiresias.

"Didst thou punish Eunice?"

"Yes, master. But thou didst command me not to disfigure her skin."

"Did I give any other command?"

"No, master," answered the slave, with alarm.

"Very good. Whom of the slaves does she love?"

"None, master."

"What dost thou know about her?"

Tiresias answered in an uncertain voice:

"Eunice does not leave the bed room at night in which she lives with old Acrisiona and Ifida. After thou art dressed she never goes to the bath rooms. Other slaves laugh at her, and call her Diana."

"Enough," said Petronius. "My relative Vinitius, to whom I offered her this morning, did not want her, hence she may remain here. Thou mayest go."

"May I speak, master, a few more words concerning Eunice?"

"I commanded thee to tell all thou knowest about her."

"The entire household is talking about the escape of the maiden who was to dwell in the house of Vinitius. After thy departure Eunice came to me and said that she knew a man who could find this maiden."

"Who is this man?" asked Petronius.

"I do not know him, master, but I thought I ought to tell thee about the matter."

"'Tis well. Let that man await to-morrow the arrival of the tribune, whom in my name thou wilt summon hither."

The slave bowed and departed. The thoughts of Petronius dwelt on Eunice. It was clear to him that the young slave woman wished Vinitius to find Lygia, so that she should not be compelled to be her substitute in the house of the tribune. It occurred to him that the man whom she had proposed for the search might be her lover. Somehow this thought hurt him. It would not be difficult to get at the truth; he had only to summon Eunice, but it was now late, and Petronius feeling weary after his long visit to the house of Chrysothemis, desired sleep. On the way to his chamber he recalled for some unknown reason that he had noticed wrinkles that day in the corners of Chrysothemis's eyes. It came to his mind also that her

reputation for beauty was greater than she deserved; and that Fonteius Capiton who had offered three boys for Eunice, wished to buy her too cheaply.

CHAPTER XIII

Next morning Petronius had scarcely dressed himself ere Vinitius, who had been summoned by Tiresias, appeared. He was aware that no news had come from the gates. This, instead of consoling him as proof that Lygia was still in the city, troubled him, for that he feared Ursus had carried her out of the city immediately after her rescue, and consequently before the slaves of Petronius had been sent to watch the gates. True, in Autumn the gates were closed earlier on account of the short days, but then they were open for the people going out. Of these there were always a great many. One could pass out of the city also by other ways, known for instance to slaves who contemplated an escape. Vinitius had dispatched his slaves to all the roads leading to the Provinces, instructing them to carry alarms to all the watchmen in the smaller towns and to furnish minute descriptions of Ursus and Lygia and to offer a reward for their capture. But it might be doubted whether the fugitives could be overtaken, or, if so, whether the local officials would arrest them at the private instance of Vinitius, unsupported by the Pretor. Vinitius had no time to gain such support. Disguised as a slave he had sought for Lygia the entire previous day in every corner of the city, but he could not find any clue. True, he had met the slaves of Aulus, who were also seeking for something, and this confirmed his belief that Aulus and Pomponia had not taken Lygia away, and that they did not know what had become of her.

So, when Tiresias had informed him that there was a man who would undertake to find Lygia, Vinitius rushed

to the house of Petronius, and, barely greeting him, began to inquire about that man.

"We shall soon see him," said Petronius. "He is an acquaintance of Eunice. She is even now coming to fold my toga. She will give us additional information."

"Is that the slave woman whom thou didst wish to give me yesterday?"

"The one whom thou didst reject, for which, by the way, I am grateful, as she is the best robe-folder in the city."

He had barely finished when Eunice entered. Taking the toga which was lying on a chair inlaid with ivory, she opened the garment to throw it over Petronius's shoulders. Her pretty face brightened, and joy was reflected in her eyes.

Petronius looked at her and she appeared beautiful to him. While she was wrapping him up in the toga, bending now and again to smooth the folds, he noticed that her arms were of a wonderful pale rose color, and that her bosom and shoulders were transparent, like mother-of-pearl or alabaster.

"Eunice," said he, "has the man come of whom thou didst speak yesterday to Tiresias?"

"Yes, master."

"What is his name?"

"Chilo Chilonides, master."

"Who is he?"

"A physician, sage and soothsayer who can read the book of fate and forecast the future."

"Did he forecast thy future?"

A rosy blush spread over the ears and neck of Eunice as she answered.

"Yes, master."

"What did he predict?"

"That pain and happiness should be my lot."

"Pain thou didst suffer yesterday at the hands of Tiresias, hence the prediction about happiness should also be realized."

"It is realized already, master."

"What is this happiness?"

"That I remain," she replied in a low voice.

Petronius put his hand on her golden head.

"Thou hast arranged the folds well to-day and I am pleased with thee, Eunice."

As his hand touched her head her eyes grew moist and her bosom began to heave quickly.

Petronius and Vinitius went into the ante-chamber, where Chilo Chilonides was waiting for them. The latter bowed low on their entrance. Petronius smiled at thought of his suspicion of yesterday that this man might be Eunice's lover. This man could be no woman's lover. His queer figure was at once repulsive and ridiculous. He was not old. Only a few gray hairs showed in his straggly beard and curled locks. He had a lank stomach. His shoulders stooped so that a cursory glance might have mistaken him for a humpback. Above his bent shoulders was a large head that seemed a cross between the face of a monkey and a fox. His eyes were bright and inquisitive. His jaundiced face was ornamented with pimples, which concentrated on his nose, suggesting an excessive love for the bottle. His disordered attire, consisting of a dark tunic of goat's wool and a ragged mantle of similar material, indicated poverty, real or pretended. At sight of him Petronius was reminded of Homer's Thersites. So, answering Chilo's bow with a wave of his hand, he said:

"I greet thee, divine Thersites; how are the lumps which Ulysses gave thee at Troy, and how is he himself in the Elysian fields?"

"Noble lord," answered Chilo, "Ulysses, the wisest of the dead, sends through me to Petronius, the wisest of the living, his greetings, and requests that thou shouldst cover my lumps with a new mantle."

"By Hecate!" exclaimed Petronius, "the answer merits a new mantle."

Vinitius impatiently interrupted the conversation and asked Chilo point-blank:

"Art thou sufficiently acquaint with the problem thou hast to solve?"

"It is not difficult to learn what the question is," answered Chilo, "when the slaves of two lordly mansions speak of nothing else, and when it is the current gossip of half of Rome. Night before last, a maiden called Lygia, a ward of Aulus Plautius, was carried away while thy slaves were bearing her from Caesar's palace to thy house. I offer to find her in Rome, or if she has left the city, which seems improbable, I shall discover for thee, noble tribune, whither she has fled and where she is hiding."

"'Tis well," said Vinitius, pleased with the confidence of the answer, "what means hast thou to accomplish this?"

Chilo smiled shrewdly: "Thou, master, hast the means. I have only the wit."

Petronius smiled also, for he was fully satisfied with his visitor. "This man can find the maiden," thought he. Vinitius frowned and said, "If thou deceivest me for gain, I will bestow a flogging upon thee."

"I am a philosopher, master, and a philosopher cannot be tempted by gain, especially such as thou dost promise so magnanimously."

"How! art thou a philosopher? Eunice told me thou wert a physician and soothsayer. How didst thou make Eunice's acquaintance?"

"She came to ask my advice, for my fame had reached her ears."

"What advice did she desire?"

"Master, she desired to be cured of unrequited love."

"Didst thou cure her?"

"I did more than that. I gave her an amulet which insures reciprocation. In Paphos, on the Island of Cyprus, there is a temple wherein a girdle of Venus is preserved, I procured her two threads from that girdle, enclosed in an almond shell."

"And no doubt thou hast received a good price for it?"

"One can never pay enough for reciprocated love. And I, who have lost two fingers of my right hand, am saving money in order to buy a slave copyist, that he may write

down my thoughts and preserve my wisdom for mankind."

"To what school dost thou belong, venerable sage?"

"Master, I am a cynic, because I wear a tattered mantle. I am stoic because I bear want patiently; I am a peripatetic because, not owning a litter, I walk from one wine shop to another, teaching on the way those who promise to pay for a pitcher of wine."

"And does the pitcher change thee into a rhetorician?"

"Heraclitus says that all is fluid. Thou canst not deny that wine is fluid."

"And he taught also that fire is a divinity; divinity therefore is perched upon thy nose."

"The divine Diogenes of Apollonia taught that the universe is created from air, and that the warmer the air, the more perfect are the created things. And as in autumn the air is cold, ergo, a genuine sage ought to warm his soul with wine. Thou canst not deny, master, that a pitcher even of the stuff made in the environs of Capua or Telesia would now impart warmth to all the bones of a perishable human body."

"Where is thy birthplace, Chilo?"

"On the Euxine Pontus. I come from Mesembria."

"Thou art a great man, O Chilo!"

"But unrecognized," said the sage in a mournful tone.

Vinitius's impatience increased. Because of the hope that Chilo had raised, he wished him to begin his search at once; hence he regarded the conversation as a waste of time and felt wroth with Petronius.

"When wilt thou begin the search?" he said, turning to the Greek.

"I have begun it already," was the answer. "Even here, even in answering thy courteous questions, I am still searching. Confide in me, noble Tribune. Know that if thou wert to lose the string from off thy sandal, I would find it, or him who picked it up."

"Hast thou ever performed such services?" asked Petronius.

The Greek lifted his eyes to heaven.

"Nowadays wisdom and virtue are so little esteemed that a philosopher is forced to seek other means of earning a livelihood."

"What other means hast thou?"

"To find out everything, and to furnish information for all who wish it."

"And who pays for it?"

"Ah, master, I must buy a copyist, otherwise my wisdom will perish with me."

"If thou hast not saved enough money to buy a new mantle, thy services evidently are not very valuable."

"Modesty forbids my speaking of them. But, master, take into consideration the fact that there are no longer so many benefactors as of old, for whom it was as great a pleasure to cover a body with gold for services rendered as to swallow an oyster from Puteoli. It is not my services that are small, but the gratitude of men. If a slave escapes, who will find him, if not the son of my father? When on the walls appear inscriptions against the divine Poppaea, who else will indicate the authors? Who will unearth in the bookshops verses against Caesar? Who will tell of conversations held in the houses of Senators and Patricians? Who will deliver letters which cannot be entrusted to slaves? Who will listen to the gossip of the barber shops? From whom have the wine and bake shops no secrets? In whom do slaves trust? Who can see at a glance through any house, from the inner chamber to the garden? Who knows every street and byway and hidden den? Who knows what is talked of in the baths, in the circus, in the markets, in the gymnasiums, in the stalls of the slave-dealers, and even in the arenas?"

"By the gods, enough! noble sage!" exclaimed Petronius, "otherwise we shall be drowned in thy virtues, thy wisdom and eloquence. Enough! we wished to know what thou art, and now we know."

Vinitius was pleased. Once put a man like this on the trail, he thought, and, houndlike, he would not stop until he had flushed the game.

"'Tis well," said he. "Dost thou need clues?"

"I need arms."

"What kind of arms?" asked Vinitius, perplexed.

Chilo stretched out one hand, while with the other he made a motion as if counting money.

"Such times as we live in!" he sighed.

"This means that thou wilt be the ass who wins the fortress by means of gold," remarked Petronius.

"I am but a poor philosopher, master," answered Chilo, with humility. "Thou hast the gold."

Vinitius tossed him a purse. The Greek caught it ere it fell, though two fingers were missing from his right hand. Then he raised his head and said:

"Master, I know already more than thou dost suspect. I came not here empty-handed. I know that Aulus and his wife did not intercept the maiden, for I have questioned their slaves. I know that she is not in the Palatine Palace, for all there are occupied with the sick child; and perhaps I know also why thou preferest my aid in the search for the maiden to that of the guards and soldiers of Caesar. I know that her escape was effected by the co-operation of a slave who came from the same country as she. He could not have procured assistance from slaves because slaves stand together, and would not have helped him against your slaves. Only his co-religionists could have given him aid."

"Hearken to these words, Vinitius," interrupted Petronius. "Have I not said the same thing to thee?"

"Thou dost me a great honor," said Chilo. "The maiden, master," he continued, addressing himself again to Vinitius, "worships beyond doubt the same divinity as Pomponia, that most virtuous of all Roman matrons. I have heard that Pomponia was tried in secret for worshipping strange Gods, but I could not learn from her slaves what kind of divinities these are, and what their adherents are called. If I could learn this I should go to them and become the most devout among them and win their confidence. But thou, master, as is known to me, hast passed a few weeks in the house of Aulus, canst not thou give me some information about these Gods?"

"I cannot," answered Vinitius.

"Thou hast questioned me long about various matters, and I have answered thee. Now allow me to question thee. Hast thou not seen, noble Tribune, some statuette, some sacrifice, some token or some amulet upon Pomponia or Lygia? Hast thou not seen them drawing some images intelligible to them alone?"

"Yes, I once saw Lygia draw a fish on sand."

"A fish? A! a! O! o! Did she draw it once or many times?"

"But once."

"And art thou sure that she drew a fish?"

"Yes, I am sure," answered Vinitius, with interest. "Dost thou know what it means?"

"Do I know!" exclaimed Chilo. Then bowing in sign of farewell, he said, "May fortune present you with all gifts, noble masters."

"Order a mantle to be brought to thee," said Petronius at parting.

"Ulysses thanks thee for Thersites," answered the Greek, and bowing again, he left the room.

"What dost thou think of that noble sage?" asked Petronius.

"I think that he will find Lygia," exclaimed Vinitius, joyfully. "But I think also that if there were a kingdom of knaves he would be crowned king there."

"Without doubt. I must get better acquainted with this Stoic. Meantime I will have this hall disinfected."

Chilo Chilonides, wrapt in his new mantle, felt beneath its folds the purse which Vinitius had given him, and rejoiced at its weight and jingle. Walking slowly and looking furtively around to see that he was followed by no one from the house of Petronius, he passed a portico of Livia, and, reaching the corner of the Virvius quarter, turned into the Suburra.

"I must go to Sporus," said he to himself, "and pour out a libation to fortune. I have at last found what I have long been looking for. He is young, passionate, bountiful as the mines of Cyprus, and is ready to give for

this Lygian linnet half of his fortune. I must deal with him carefully, however, for his frowns forebode no good. Oh, the wolf-whelps rule the world to-day! I should not be so afraid of Petronius. Oh, Gods! to be a procurer pays better in these times than virtue. Ah! she drew a fish on the sand. May I choke myself with goat's cheese if I know the meaning of that symbol. But I shall find out! As fish live under water, and seeking under water is harder than on land, he shall pay me liberally for this fish. One more purse like this and I might cast aside the beggar's wallet and purchase myself a slave. But suppose, oh, Chilo, if I advised thee to buy not a male but a female slave? I know thee! I am sure that thou wouldst say yea! Were she as beautiful as Eunice, for instance, thou wouldst grow young at her side. Moreover, thou wouldst draw from her a large and certain income. I sold that poor Eunice two threads from my old mantle. She is stupid. Nevertheless, if Petronius would give her to me, I would not reject her. Yea! yea! Chilo, thou hast lost both thy father and thy mother. Thou art an orphan; therefore, purchase a female slave to console thee. She must have shelter, therefore Vinitius will hire a dwelling for her, in which thou also mayest abide; she must have raiment, therefore Vinitius will pay for it; and she must have food, therefore he will provide it. Oh, it is costly to live in this world! Oh, for the times when a farthing would buy as much pork and beans as one could hold in both hands, or a piece of goat's entrails as long as the arm of a twelve-year-old boy. But here is that knave Sporus. 'Twill be easier to gain some information in the wineshop."

He entered the shop and ordered a pitcher of wine. Noting the distrustful look of the shopkeeper, he took a gold coin from the purse and threw it on the table.

"Sporus," he cried, "I worked to-day with Seneca from dawn until noon, and here, see what my friend hath given me!"

The big eyes of Sporus grew bigger still at sight of the coin. In a twinkling the wine was placed before

Chilo, who, moistening his fingers, drew a fish on the table and said:

"Dost know what that means?"

"A fish? A fish means a fish."

"Thou art stupid, though thou dost add so much water to the wine that one might find a fish in it. It is a symbol, which in the language of philosophers means 'the smile of fortune.' Shouldst thou divine it, thou, too, mightst make a fortune. And, look you, honor philosophy, or I shall change my wine shop, which my dear friend Petronius has long urged me to do."

CHAPTER XIV

For some days Chilo disappeared from sight. The information Vinitius had received from Actea that Lygia loved him made him a hundredfold more eager to find her. Through his slaves he instituted a careful search. He was both unwilling and unable to appeal to Caesar, whose attention was now completely absorbed in the dangerous illness of the little Augusta. Nothing availed to help the child, neither sacrifices in the temples, nor prayers, nor vows, nor the skill of physicians, nor the magic spells to which they had recourse when the last hope had vanished. At the end of a week the infant died. The Court and the whole city of Rome were plunged in mourning. Caesar, who had been wild with delight at the birth of the child, was now equally wild with grief. Shutting himself up in his room, he refused food for two days. The Court was crowded with Senators and Augustales, who hastened thither with their condolences. Caesar denied himself to all. The Senate assembled in extraordinary session, and proclaimed that the little Augusta was a goddess. The Senators decided to dedicate a temple to her and appoint a special priest for the service of the new goddess. In other temples sacrifices were also

offered to her. Statues were cast from precious metals. Her funeral was celebrated with unprecedented solemnity. The people marvelled at the unrestrained grief to which Caesar surrendered himself. They wept with him, stretched out their hands for gifts, and above all found amusement in the splendid pageant. The death of the little Augusta alarmed Petronius. All Rome was aware that Poppaea ascribed it to witchcraft. The physicians eagerly caught up her words as a convenient excuse for their unsuccessful efforts. So likewise did the priests whose sacrifices had proved unavailing, the soothsayers who trembled for their lives, and the people generally. Petronius was now glad that Lygia had disappeared. He wished no evil to the house of Aulus, and especially he wished good to himself and to Vinitius. As soon as the cypress placed before the Palatine, as a sign of mourning, had been removed, he went to the reception appointed for Senators and Augustales, to learn how far Nero had credited the rumors of witchcraft and to neutralize the possible consequences.

With his knowledge of Nero, he was convinced that though he did not believe in witchcraft he would feign belief, partly through self-deception, partly through a desire for revenge, but especially for the purpose of averting the suspicion that the gods were punishing him for his crimes. Petronius did not admit that Caesar had any deep or sincere love even for his own child, though he made a great show of attachment. But he had not the least doubt that Nero would pretend an exaggerated grief. Nor was he mistaken. Nero listened with stony face and fixed stare to the condolences of knights and Senators. It was evident that even if he were suffering he was simultaneously taking thought of the impression which his despair made on others. He was posing as a Niobe and giving a representation of paternal sorrow, such as an actor might give on a stage. Yet even now he could not long retain his attitude of stony and silent sorrow. At one moment he would make a gesture as if casting

dust upon his head, at another he groaned deeply. Seeing Petronius, he assumed a tone of tragic pathos, evidently wishing that all should hear him.

"Eheu!" he cried. "Thou art the cause of her death. By thy advice the evil spirit was admitted to these walls, which at one glance smote the life out of her breast. Woe is me! Better that I had never seen the bright face of the sun god. Woe is me! Eheu! Eheu!"

Gradually raising his voice he filled the chamber with exclamations of despair. Petronius saw that he must put everything to the hazard of a die. He stretched out his hand, seized the kerchief, which was always around Caesar's neck, and put it on Nero's lips.

"Caesar," he cried, solemnly, "let Rome and the whole world perish from grief, but preserve thy voice for us!"

All present were astonished. Caesar himself was stricken dumb for a moment. Petronius alone stood unmoved; he well knew what he was doing. He did not forget that Terpnos and Diodorus had an order to close Caesar's mouth whenever his voice might be threatened by over-exertion.

"Oh, Caesar!" continued Petronius, in the same sad and persuasive voice, "we have suffered an immense loss, but let this treasure remain to console us."

Nero's face quivered. Tears stood in his eyes. Placing his arm on Petronius's shoulder, he suddenly bent his head to his breast, and in a voice choked by sobs he began:

"Only thou, Petronius, hast reminded me of this, only thou, Petronius, only thou!" Tigellinus grew yellow with envy. Again Petronius turned to Nero:

"Go to Antium. There she appeared unto the world; thence issued thy joy; thither consolation will come to thee. Let the sea air refresh thy divine throat; let thy breast breathe in the soft moisture of the air. We, thy loving servants, will follow thee everywhere, and when we comfort thy sorrow with our friendship, thou wilt console us in turn with song."

"Yes," answered Nero, sadly, "I will write a hymn

in her honor, and I will also compose the music for it."

"And then thou wilt go to Baiae and revive under the warm rays of the sun."

"And later I will seek forgetfulness in Greece."

"In the land of poetry and song."

His mood of stony grief gradually dispersed like clouds that cover the sun. Then ensued a conversation, which though still full of signs of sorrow, was none the less enlivened by plans for the coming journey. They spoke of the exhibitions that Caesar would make of his artistic skill, of the feasts that would be prepared for the expected arrival of Tiridates, King of Armenia. It is true, Tigellinus tried to bring up once more the matter of witchcraft, but Petronius took up the challenge with full assurance of victory. "Tigellinus," said he, "dost thou think that witchcraft can harm the gods?"

"Caesar himself hath spoken of spells," answered the courtier.

" 'Twas grief speaking with his lips. But tell us what thou thinkest of them thyself?"

"The gods are too powerful to be influenced by spells."

"And dost thou not acknowledge the divinity of Caesar and his family?"

"It is finished," exclaimed Eprius Marcellus, who stood close by, repeating the shout used in the circus when a gladiator had received a mortal blow. Tigellinus smothered his rage. Between him and Petronius had long existed a rivalry for the favor of Nero. Tigellinus had this advantage, that Nero observed no ceremony in his presence, but Petronius hitherto had always vanquished Tigellinus in every encounter of wit and judgment. And so it happened now. Tigellinus grew silent; he occupied himself merely by impressing upon his memory the names of the Senators who crowded around Petronius at the other end of the hall, in the expectation that after this victory he would become the prime favorite of Caesar.

Petronius on leaving the palace, directed his litter to be borne to the house of Vinitius. He informed the latter of his encounter with Caesar and Tigellinus and added:

"I have removed all danger, not only from Aulus Plautius and Pomponia, but also from ourselves, and more particularly from Lygia. She will not now be pursued, for the reason that I have persuaded the Red-bearded ape to go to Antium, and then to Naples or Baiae. He will surely go. He has not yet made up his mind to an appearance before the Roman public in the theatre, but I know that for some time he has purposed to make a trial in Naples. Moreover, he is dreaming of a visit to Greece, where he wishes to sing in all the principal cities. After that, he will make a triumphal entry into Rome, with all the wreaths which the Greeklets may bestow upon him. In the meanwhile we will have an opportunity to search for Lygia without hindrance, and to hide her in a safe place if we find her. But has not our noble philosopher returned yet?"

"Thy noble philosopher is a cheat. He has not appeared, and we may be certain of never casting eyes upon him."

"Nay, I have a better opinion, if not of his honesty, at least of his wit. He has drawn blood once from thy purse; be assured that he will return, even were it only to draw blood a second time."

"Let him beware lest I draw his own blood."

"Do not do that. Bear with him until thou art entirely convinced of his deceit. Give him no more money, but promise him a liberal reward in case he brings thee correct information. But thou thyself, what art thou doing in this matter?"

"Two of my freedmen, Nimphidius and Demas, with sixty slaves, are in full pursuit. I have promised freedom to him who finds her. Further, I have sent special messengers to inquire of Ursus and the maiden, in all the inns leading to Rome. Day and night, I myself traverse the city in the hope of a chance meeting."

"Whatever thou learnest inform me of it by letter. I must go to Antium."

"It is well."

"And if some fine morning thou wakest to say to thy-

self that it is not worth while to waste time and pains on a maiden, then come thou to Antium, and there we will have plenty of women and amusement."

Vinitius strode with long steps across the floor. Petronius gazed at him for some time before he again broke silence. "Tell me frankly," he said, at last, "not as a dreamer who conceals something within himself, but as a man of sense answering a friend. Art thou still carried away by Lygia?"

Vinitius stopped for a moment, and gazed at Petronius as intently as if he had never seen him before. Then he resumed his walk. Evidently he was restraining an outburst. But the sense of his own impotence, the pain, the wrath and the ceaseless yearning which possessed him moved him to tears. His dim eyes spoke to Petronius with more force than the most eloquent words. After a moment's thought the elder said:

"'Tis not Atlas who bears the world on his shouders, but—but—women, and sometimes they play with it as with a ball."

"True," answered Vinitius. Then they bade each other farewell. But just then a slave announced that Chilo Chilonides was outside in the ante-chamber, awaiting permission to enter. Vinitius ordered his instant admittance.

"Behold!" laughed Petronius. "Did I not tell thee so? By Hercules, preserve thy calm, otherwise he will subdue thee; not thou him."

"Salutations and honor to the noble soldier and Tribune, and to you, oh, master," said Chilo, entering. "May your good fortune equal your fame, and may your fame resound over the world from the pillars of Hercules to the uttermost boundaries."

"A greeting to thee, wise and virtuous law-giver," answered Petronius. Vinitius asked with assumed calmness, "What news hast thou brought?"

"Master, on my first visit I brought thee hope, and now I bring assurance that the maiden will be found."

"Which means that the maiden is not yet found?"

"True, master, but I have discovered the meaning of

the sign she drew. I now know who are the people that rescued her, and I also know among what class of religionists she must be sought."

Vinitius was on the point of leaping from the chair whereon he sat, but Petronius laid his hand on the young man's shoulder and turning to Chilo said: "Speak on."

"Art thou certain, oh, master, that the maiden drew a fish upon the sand?"

"Yes," exclaimed Vinitius.

"Then she is a Christian, and Christians have taken her away."

A moment of silence followed.

"Hearken, Chilo," said Petronius, "my kinsman hath set aside for thee a large reward for the finding of Lygia, and no smaller allowances of lashes if thou art striving to deceive him. In the first case, thou wilt be able to buy not merely one, but three copyists; in the second case, not all the philosophy of all the seven sages and thine own in addition will serve thee as a healing ointment."

"Master, this maiden is a Christian," insisted the Greek.

"Hearken, Chilo, thou art no fool. We know that Unia Sylana and Calvia Crispinilla accused Pomponia Graecina of professing the Christian superstition. It is also known to us that a private investigation acquitted her from this charge. Dost thou wish to renew it? Dost thou think thou wilt be able to convince us that both Pomponia and Lygia belong among the enemies of the human race, the poisoners of fountains and wells, the worshippers of an ass's head, among a people who murder infants and who give themselves up to the foulest corruptions? Beware, Chilo! lest the thesis announced by thee be not turned back upon thee as an antithesis."

Chilo spread out his hands as a sign that it was not his fault, and said:

"Lord, pronounce the following words in Greek: 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.'"

"Well, I have done so, but what of that?"

"Now take the first letters of each word, and form

them in such a manner as to compose a new word."

"Fish!" cried Petronius, astonished.

"Now thou seest why the symbol of a fish became the symbol of Christianity."

The argument of the Greek was so convincing that both the friends remained buried in thought.

"Vinitius," asked Petronius, "art thou not mistaken? Did she really draw a fish?"

"By all the infernal gods, dost thou wish to drive me insane?" cried the young man, wrathfully. "Had she drawn a bird I should have said a bird."

"It follows that she is a Christian," repeated Chilo.

"Which means," said Petronius, "that Pomponia and Lygia are poisoning wells, murdering kidnapped children, and giving themselves up to corruption. Nonsense! Thou, Vinitius, didst remain for some time in their house. I was not there long, but I know Aulus and Pomponia well enough. If a fish be the symbol of the Christians, which is really difficult to deny, and if they are all Christians, then, by Proserpina! it is evident that Christians are not what we suppose them."

"Master, thou speakest like Socrates,"replied Chilo. "Who has ever interrogated a Christian? Who is familiar with that creed? When, three years ago, I passed from Naples to Rome (oh, wherefore did I not remain there?), I was joined by one Glaucus, who was said to be a Christian, and in spite of this, I convinced myself that he was a good and virtuous man."

"Did this virtuous man inform thee of the meaning of the fish?"

"Master, on the road this honorable man was stabbed in an inn, and his wife and child were taken away from him by slave-dealers. In their defense I lost these two fingers. But they say that there is no lack of miracles among Christians, so I hope that these two fingers may grow out again."

"How is that? Hast thou become a Christian?"

"Since yesterday, oh, master, since yesterday. This fish has made me a Christian. See what power it has.

In a few days I shall become one of the most zealous of believers, so that I may be admitted to all their secrets. But when I am admitted, I shall learn where the maiden is. Then perchance my Christianity will pay me better than my philosophy. I made a vow to Mercury that if he aided me in finding the maiden I would sacrifice to him two heifers of the same age and size, whose horns I shall gild."

"Which means that your Christianity of yesterday, and your philosophy of the day before, allow thee to believe in Mercury?"

"I always believe in what I need to believe in. Such is my philosophy, and it ought to harmonize with the taste of Mercury in especial. But you, worthy lords, know what a suspicious god he is. He trusts not the vows of the most irreproachable philosophers. Perchance he may desire the heifers in advance, but this involves a large outlay. Not every one can be a Seneca, and I cannot afford the expense, unless the noble Vinitius be willing to advance a portion of the promised reward."

"Not a farthing, Chilo," said Petronius, "not a farthing. The liberality of Vinitius will surpass thy expectations, but not before thou findest Lygia, or showest her place of concealment. Mercury must trust thee for the two heifers, though I do not wonder that he does it unwillingly. I see Mercury has wit."

"Listen to me, worthy masters. The discovery I have made is a very great discovery. For, though I have not yet found the maiden, I have found the method by which she may be found. Ye have scattered freedmen and slaves throughout the city. Has any one of them given you a clue? No; I am the only one who has found one. I will say more. Among your slaves may be slaves of whom ye know nothing. This superstition hath spread itself everywhere. Instead of helping you they may betray you. It is even dangerous for me to be seen here. Therefore, thou, noble Petronius, swear Eunice to silence, and thou, noble Vinitius, announce that I am selling thee an ointment which secures certain victory for horses in

the circus. I alone will seek her, and I alone will find the fugitives. But have faith in me, and know that whatever I receive in advance will be only a stimulus, for I will always hope to receive more, and will be more certain that the promised reward will not fail me. Yea, this is true. As a philosopher I have a contempt for money, though it is not scorned by Seneca, nor by Carnutus; yet these philosophers have not lost two fingers in defense of some unfortunate. They can write themselves and leave their names to posterity. But, besides the slave whom I wish to buy, and Mercury, to whom I have promised two heifers (and ye know how dear cattle are at present), the search itself involves numerous expenses. Listen to me patiently. During these last few days my feet have become sore from continuous walking. I have sought converse with people in the wine shops, in the bakeries, in the butcher shops, and with oil dealers and fishermen. I have run through all the streets and lanes; I have been in the dens of escaped slaves; I have lost large sums of money playing mora; I have been in laundries, in drying sheds, and in lunch rooms; I have met mule drivers and carvers, men who cure troubles of the bladder, and men who pull teeth.

"I have talked with dealers in dried figs; I have been in cemeteries; and know ye my object in all this? 'Twas in order to draw a fish everywhere, to look into people's eyes and to hear what they might say when they saw this sign. For a long time I learnt nothing. Then at last I met an old slave at a fountain, drawing water and weeping. Approaching, I asked the cause of his tears. We both took our seats on the steps of the fountain, when he told me that all his lifetime he has been saving up sesterces to redeem his beloved son from slavery; but his master, Pausa by name, on seeing the money, took it and kept the son in slavery. 'And so I weep,' said the old man, 'for though I repeat 'the will of God be done,' yet I, a poor sinner, cannot restrain my tears.' Then I moistened my finger in the pail of water and drew the figure of a fish, at which he remarked: 'I also put my trust in Christ.'

Then I asked him: 'Didst thou recognize me by this sign?' and he answered: 'Yea, may peace be with thee.' I then began to question him and the old man told me all. His master Pausa is himself a freedman of the great Pausa. He ships along the Tiber to Rome, stone in boats, which slaves and hirelings unload and carry to buildings at night-time so as not to obstruct the streets during the day. Many Christians are engaged in this work, and among them his son; but as the work is beyond his son's strength, he desired to redeem him. But Pausa kept both the money and the slave. While relating this, the old man wept again and I followed his example, which was not difficult, because of my kind heart and the pain in my feet, caused by continual walking. I lamented, likewise, that I had arrived recently from Naples, so that I knew none of the brethren, nor where they assembled for prayer. He marvelled that the brethren in Naples had not given me letters of recommendation to the brethren in Rome, but I explained to him that I had been robbed of my letters on the way. Then he instructed me to come to the river at night and he would introduce me to the brethren, who would conduct me to the houses of prayer and to the elders who rule this Christian community. I was so overjoyed by this information that I gave him the necessary amount for his son's redemption, feeling confident that the magnanimous Vinitius would return me double the amount."

"Chilo," interrupted Petronius, "in thy narrative falsehood floats on the surface of truth as oil on water. No doubt thou hast brought important news. I think indeed that a great step has been taken towards finding Lygia; but do not mix falsehood with truth. What is the name of the old man from whom thou didst learn that Christians recognize one another by the sign of a fish?"

"Euritius is his name, master, a poor unfortunate old man. He reminds me of Glaucus, whom I defended from murderers."

"I believe thou didst make his acquaintance and that thou wilt be able to make use of this acquaintance, but thou didst give him no money. Thou didst not even give

him one farthing, dost understand? Thou didst not give him anything."

"But I assisted him to lift his pail and I spoke of his son with the greatest sympathy. Yea, master, what can be concealed from the insight of Petronius? I did not give him any money, or more correctly, I gave to him in intention only. This would have sufficed him had he been a true philosopher. I gave it to him because I considered the gift necessary and useful; for think how this will win for me the hearts of all the Christians, and how I will secure access to them and win their confidence."

"True," said Petronius, "but it was to thy interest to do it." Then Petronius turning to Vinitius, said:

"Order that five thousand sesterces be counted out to him, but in intention only."

But Vinitius said: "I will give thee a servant who will carry the necessary amount. Thou wilt tell Euritius that the servant is thy slave, and thou wilt count out the money to the old man in the servant's presence. But as thou hast brought important news thou shalt have the same amount for thyself. Call this evening for the servant and the money."

"Thou art as liberal as Caesar," cried Chilo; "permit me, master, to dedicate my work to thee, but permit also that I come this evening for the money only, as Euritius informed me that the boats had all been unloaded, and that others would not follow from Ostia until a few days have passed. May peace be with you! thus do Christians greet one another. I shall buy a female slave. No, I mean a male slave. Fish are caught with a bait and Christians with fish. Peace be with ye! Peace! Peace!"

CHAPTER XV

Petronius to Vinitius:

I forward this letter from Antium by a faithful slave, expecting that thou wilt return an answer without delay,

by the bearer, although thy hand is better used to the sword than to the pen. I left thee hopeful and on a clear trail. I trust, therefore, that thou hast already satisfied thy sweet desires in the arms of Lygia, or that thou wilt satisfy them ere the winter winds from the summits of Soracte shall blow on the Campania. Oh, dear Vinitius! may the golden-haired goddess of Cyprus be thy instructor, and mayst thou in turn be the instructor of this Lygian morning star, fleeing before the sun of love. But remember that even the most precious marble is nothing in itself, and that it obtains real value only when the sculptor makes of it a masterpiece. Be thou such a sculptor, oh, my beloved! To love is not enough, one should know how to love and how to teach love. Even the common people and animals experience sensual delight, but a genuine man differs from them in this, that he transforms love into a noble art, and, conscious of its divine meaning, recreates it in his mind, so that he satisfies not only his heart, but his soul. Often when I think of the vanity, the uncertainty and cares of life, it comes to my mind that perhaps thou hast taken the wiser course, and that not the court of Caesar, but war and love are the only things worth being born and living for.

Thou hast been fortunate in war, be fortunate also in love; and if thou art curious to know what goes on at the court of Caesar, I will send thee news of everything. We are sojourning here at Antium and taking care of our divine voice, cherishing an unchangeable hatred to Rome, and intending to spend the winter at Baiae to appear in public at Naples, whose citizens, being of Greek descent, are better critics than the wolf brood on the banks of the Tiber. People will come from Baiae, from Pompeii, from Puteoli, from Cumae, and from Stabiae; there will be no lack of applause or crowds, and this will be an encouragement for the expected expedition to Achaea.

As regards the memory of little Augusta? yes, we are still lamenting her. We are singing hymns of our own composition, so beautiful, that the sirens, from envy, are hiding in the deepest caves of Amphitrite. The dolphins

themselves would listen to us were it not for the noise of the sea. Our grief is not yet over, hence we shall exhibit it in every form of sculpture known to art, and we are careful that our postures shall be beautiful and that the world shall recognize this beauty. Oh, my friend, let us be mountebanks and comedians as long as we live.

All the Augustales are here, male and female, not including five hundred she-asses, in whose milk Poppaea bathes, and ten thousand servants. At times it is even cheerful. Calvia Crispinilla is growing old. It is said that she petitioned Poppaea to be permitted to bathe after herself. Lucan slapped Nigidia's face because he suspected her of relations with a gladiator. Sporus lost his wife to Senecio at dice. Torquatus Sillanus has offered me for Eunice four chestnut horses which will surely win this year at the races. But I declined the offer. I am grateful to thee that thou didst not accept her. As to Torquatus Sillanus, he, poor wretch, does not suspect that he is more of a shadow than a man. His fate is decided. Dost thou know what his crime is? He is the great grandson of the divine Augustus. There is no help for him. Such is our world.

As thou knowest, we have been expecting Tiridates. Meanwhile, we have received an offensive letter from Vologeses. Having conquered Armenia, he asks that it be left to him for Tiridates; and if it be not left to him, he declares he will hold it in any case. This is mockery! We have decided on war. Corbulo will be given such power as Pompius Magnus received in the war against the pirates. There was a moment when Nero hesitated. He evidently fears the glory which Corbulo may win by martial deeds. It was even thought to give the chief command to our Aulus, but Poppaea, to whom Pomponia's virtue is as salt in the eye, opposed it.

Vatinius notified us of a remarkable gladiatoral combat which he is preparing in Beneventum. Behold the height to which cobblers rise in our time, despite the saying, "Let the cobbler stick to his last." Vitelius is the descendant of a cobbler, but Vatinius is the son of one. Perhaps

he himself has stitched with the waxed thread! Alituras, the actor, gave a great representation of Oedipus yesterday. He is a Jew, and I asked him whether Jews and Christians were the same? He answered that the Jewish religion is a very ancient one, but that the Christians are a new sect, risen lately in Judea; that in the time of Tiberius a man was crucified, whose followers are increasing daily. He has even been deified by them. The Christians, it seems, refuse to worship all other gods, especially ours. I comprehend not the harm which such worship would do them.

Tigellinus openly manifests his enmity to me. As yet he has not prevailed against me, though he is my superior in that he cares more for life and is at the same time a greater knave than I, which helps him in Bronzebeard's eyes. Sooner or later these two will understand each other and then my turn will come. I do not know when this will happen, but 'tis only a question of time. Meantime I must enjoy life. Life would not be a bad thing, if it were not for Bronzebeard. Thanks to him, one revolts at times, disgusted against oneself.

The struggle for his favor must not be placed upon the same plane as that of rivals in the circus, or in games, where the victory is desired on account of ambition. True, I often explain it to myself in these terms; but at other times it seems to me that I am in no way better than Chilo. When thou dost need him no longer, send him to me. I delight in his edifying conversation. Present my greeting to thy divine Christian maiden, or, rather, implore her in my name not to be a fish to thee. Write to me about thy health and the progress of thy love affair, know how to love, teach how to love, and farewell.

Vinitius to Petronius:

Lygia has not yet been found. Were it not for the hope that I shall find her ere long, thou wouldst not receive this answer, for one is not inclined to letter-writing

when concerned in a matter of life or death. I wished to find out whether Chilo was deceiving me, so on the night that he came to secure the money for Euritius I wrapped myself in a military cloak, and followed him and the servant whom I sent with him. When they reached the appointed place, I watched them from a distance, hiding behind a portico pillar, and I convinced myself that Euritius had not been invented for the occasion. Below, by the river, groups of workmen were unloading stones from a large boat and hoisting them on the bank. I saw Chilo approach and enter into conversation with an old man, who knelt down before him. Others surrounded them, looking on with astonishment. Before my eyes the servant gave the purse to Euritius, who, seizing it, began to pray, raising his hands to the sky. At the old man's side another was kneeling, evidently his son. Chilo said something that I could not hear, and blessed the kneeling figures and the others about them, making in the air a sign in the form of a cross, which evidently they all honor, for all knelt down. I would have approached them, to promise three such purses to him who would deliver Lygia to me, but I feared lest I might spoil Chilo's work; so, after hesitating for a moment, I departed.

This was some twelve days after thy departure. Chilo has visited me frequently since. He tells me that he has gained great influence among the Christians. He explains that if he has not yet found Lygia, 'tis because there are such multitudes of Christians in Rome that they are not all acquainted with one another, and cannot know everything that goes on in the community. Besides, the Christians are wary and usually reticent. But he assures me that when he comes in contact with the elders, called presbyters, he will be able to learn everything from them. He has gained access to some of them already, and has begun to question them, though with the utmost circumspection, lest he awaken their suspicions and thus raise difficulties in his own path. It is hard to

wait, and I am impatient, but I feel that he is right, and I wait.

He has gleaned the further information that the Christians assemble for prayer beyond the city gates, in empty houses, and even in sand pits. They pray to Christ, sing hymns, and hold feasts. They have many such places of assembly. Chilo thinks that Lygia goes intentionally to different places of worship than those frequented by Pomponia, so that the latter, if questioned by the authorities, would be able to swear that she did not know Lygia's hiding place. Perhaps the presbyters suggested this precaution. When Chilo discovers these places I will go with him, and if the gods permit me a sight of Lygia, by Jupiter! she shall not escape me.

My thoughts dwell continually on these places of prayer. Chilo does not wish me to go with him. He is afraid. But I cannot sit idle at home. I should recognize her at once, even in disguise, or veiled. The Christians assemble during the night, but I should recognize her even at night. I should know her voice and movements under all possible conditions.

I will go myself in disguise and scrutinize every person who comes in or goes out. I think of her always, and shall certainly recognize her. Chilo is to come for me tomorrow, and we shall go. I shall take arms with me. Some of my slaves whom I sent to the provinces have returned without any news. I am certain now that she is here in the city, and possibly not far away. I myself have looked through many houses under the pretext of hiring them. She will be far better off with me, for she is now probably dwelling amid poverty. I shall refuse her nothing. Thou sayest that I have chosen the happier lot Nay, I have chosen only suffering and sorrow. We shall go first to the houses within the city, then to those beyond the gates. Hope is born anew in my breast every morning, otherwise I could not live. Thou sayest that one should know how to love. I could speak of love to Lygia but now I only yearn; I wait for Chilo, and I cannot stay at home. Farewell.

CHAPTER XVI

It was a long time before Chilo showed himself again. Vinitius knew not what to think. Vainly he repeated to himself that a successful search must be slow and careful. Hot-tempered and hot-blooded, he would not listen to the voice of reason. To do nothing, to wait and sit with folded hands, was so repugnant that he could not reconcile himself to it. To run in the disguise of a slave through dark streets and alleys, without result, seemed a useless employment of energy. His freedmen, quick, sagacious and experienced, whom he had commanded to make an independent search, proved themselves to be a hundredfold less expert than Chilo. But Vinitius, in addition to his love for Lygia, felt the gambler's craving for victory. This had always been one of his characteristics. From his childhood he had accomplished all his wishes with the passion of one who does not understand the word impossible, or recognize the necessity of surrender. Military discipline had, for a period, put bounds upon his own will, but it awakened in him at the same time the sense that every command given by him to his subordinates must be carried out at any cost. His long sojourn in the East, among a docile people accustomed to slavish obedience, strengthened him in his belief that there was no "nay" to his "I will." His pride as well as his heart was wounded. The flight of Lygia was unintelligible to him. He racked his head in striving to solve the puzzle. He felt that Actea told the truth—that Lygia was not indifferent to him. Yet, if this were so, why did she prefer vagrancy and misery to his love, to his caresses and to his luxurious home? He could not answer this question. He only had an undefinable comprehension that between him and Lygia, between her feelings and his, between the world of Lygia and Pomponia and that in which he and Petronius lived, there existed a discrepancy as deep and

impassable as an abyss. His one thought was that he must lose Lygia; but at that thought he lost all the remnant of self-control which Petronius sought to bolster up. There were times when he knew not whether he would love or hate Lygia in case he found her; but one thing he knew, was that he must find her. Better that she were swallowed up in the bowels of the earth than that he should surrender her. The strength of his imagination often conjured her up visibly before his eyes. He recalled almost every word that he had ever spoken to her, or heard from her; he felt her near him; felt her lying on his bosom, in his arms; and pride and passion reawakened in him like flame. He loved her and called upon her, and when he remembered that she loved him in turn, and might yield willingly to his desire, a deep sadness overcame him. This sadness flooded his heart like gigantic sea waves. At times his face grew livid from anger. His inward passion would have riven his heart had he not found solace in gloating over the tortures which he would inflict upon Lygia if he found her, in vengeance for the tortures she had inflicted upon him. He desired not merely to possess her, but to possess her as an abject and humiliated slave. Nevertheless, he felt that if the choice were given him to be her slave or never to see her, he would rather be her slave. He revelled in the very thought of the scars that his merciless whip would inflict upon her rosy body, but simultaneously a wild desire arose within him to kiss those scars. He even thought that he would be happy if he could kill her. The torture, torment, excitement and doubt told upon his health, and even upon his manly beauty. He became cruel and unreasonable. Slaves and freedmen approached him trembling. He punished them without mercy and without pretext, and they grew to hate him secretly. He recognized this, and felt his isolation still more keenly and wreaked a still bitterer and more unreasonable revenge. With Chilo alone he was on friendly terms, for he feared that Chilo might give up his search. Chilo divined the reason, established greater control over him, and

grew more domineering in his demands. At first he had assured Vinitius that the task would be easily and speedily accomplished. Now he inwardly exerted himself to invent new difficulties, and, although holding out the hope of ultimate success, insisted that time was needed. Finally, after many days had passed, he arrived with so troubled a look that the young man paled at sight of him. Springing up, he had barely strength to ask him:

"Is she not among the Christians?"

"Of course she is," answered Chilo; "but among them I have found a physician, Glaucus."

"What of that? Who is Glaucus?"

"Master, hast thou forgotten the old man with whom I travelled from Naples to Rome, in whose defense I lost these two fingers—a loss that has deprived me of the use of a pen? The robbers who carried off his wife and children stabbed him with a knife. I left him in a dying condition at a tavern in Minturnae, and mourned for him a long time. But, alas! I have now ascertained that he is alive, and a member of the Christian community in Rome."

Vinitius, who could not catch the drift of this speech, but only understood that Glaucus in some way was an obstacle in his path, suppressed his rising impatience, and said:

"He should be grateful for thy assistance and now aid thee in return."

"Yea, honorable Tribune. But if the gods themselves are not always grateful, what can we expect from men? Yea, he should be grateful. But, alas! he is an old man. His mind is bowed and darkened by age and disappointment. I learn not only that he is ungrateful, but that he has accused me to his fellow-Christians, saying that I did conspire with the thieves and that I am the cause of all his misfortunes. Such is my reward for my two lost fingers."

"Caitiff!" cried Vinitius, "I know that he tells the truth."

"Then thou knowest more than he does, for his is

only a guess. But that guess would suffice for him to call the Christians to aid him in some cruel revenge. He would certainly have done this sooner and found many willing Christians, but that happily he knows not my name. In the house of prayer where I ran against him he did not recognize me. But I recognized him at once. My first impulse would have been to throw myself on his neck. Prudence and long habits of self-restraint preserved me from this. But on leaving the place I made inquiries and learned from his acquaintances that this was a man who had been betrayed by his companion on the way from Naples. And that is how I know what story he gives out."

"What is all this to me? Tell me, what sawest thou in the house of prayer?"

"It may be nothing to thee, master, but 'tis everything to me. As I wish my wisdom to survive me, rather would I renounce the reward thou hast offered than sacrifice my life for empty gain. A true philosopher can always live without lucre and devote his time to the search for wisdom."

Vinitius bent upon him a menacing look and said in a voice that trembled with wrath:

"Who told thee that death was more certain at the hands of Glaucus than of mine? And how knowest thou that I will not bury thee even now like a dog in my garden?"

Chilo caught that glance and trembled. He knew that one more unguarded remark might destroy him.

"I will seek, master, and I will find!" he cried hastily.

A silence followed. Only the heavy breathing of Vinitius and the far-off songs of slaves at work in the garden could be heard. Not until Chilo had assured himself that the young Tribune had grown calmer did he resume the conversation.

"Death hath often passed so close as to touch me, but I looked at it with the coldness of a Socrates. No, master, I have not said that I would renounce the search for the girl, but only that this search involves much danger for me. There was a time when thou didst doubt the

very existence of a certain Euritius, but thou didst ascertain with thine own eyes that the son of my father told thee the truth. Now, thou thinkest that I have conjured up an imaginary Glaucus. Alas! were he really a fiction and could I walk among the Christians as safely as of yore, I would cheerfully give up the poor old slave whom three days ago I purchased for my assistance in my old age and decrepitude. But, master, Glaucus is alive. Were he to see me, even once, thou wouldst never see me again. Then who would discover the girl?" He ceased, dried his eyes and continued: "So long as Glaucus is alive, how can I continue my search for her, when I may meet him at any moment? If I meet him, I am lost, and with me the search is lost."

"What dost thou think of doing? What is thy advice? What is thy decision?" asked Vinitius.

"Master, Aristotle teaches that small things must be sacrificed to great. King Priam always said that old age is a heavy burden. This burden has oppressed the aged Glaucus for long years, so heavily, indeed, that death would be a benefaction. And, indeed, what is death? According to Seneca, 'tis but a release."

"Keep thy jesting for Petronius, not for me. Tell me thy intentions."

"If virtue be a jest, may the gods allow me to remain a jester forever. I wish to put Glaucus out of the way. While he lives, my life and the search are in the greatest danger."

"Hire men to beat him to death with clubs, I will pay the bill."

"Master, thou wilt only go to needless expense and disclose thy secrets in vain. There are as many rascals in Rome as there are grains of sand in the Arena. Thou knowest not what might happen if an honest man needed their base services. No, worthy Tribune, suppose the watchmen caught the murderers in the act? They would undoubtedly reveal the name of him who had hired them, and great trouble might follow. 'Tis not I that will be denounced, for they know not my name. Thou art wrong

in failing to trust me. Thou wouldst defile my sincerity with mire. Two things interest me, the wholeness of my skin, and the reward which thou hast promised me."

"How much dost thou need?"

"I need a thousand sesterces, for look you, master, I must find honest rascals, who will not disappear after taking bribes and leave no trace behind them. Good work requires good pay. Something should be added also for me, to wipe away the tears of sorrow that I will shed over Glaucus. The gods be my witness how I love him. Could I get the thousand sesterces to-day, in two days his soul will be wandering in Hades. Then and there, if souls retain the power of memory and of reason, he will learn how deeply I loved him. I will find the men this very day and tell them that for every day of Glaucus's continued existence one hundred sesterces will be subtracted from their pay. Then there will be no failure."

Vinitius once more promised him the stipulated sum. He forbade him, however, to speak further of Glaucus. He also questioned him as to what news he brought, where he had been in the interval, what he had seen, and what he had discovered. But Chilo had little news to tell. He had been in two more places of prayer, he had carefully watched every one, especially the women, but had seen no one who bore any resemblance to Lygia. The Christians all looked upon him as one of themselves. Ever since the time when he had ransomed the son of Euritius, they had honored him as one who trod in the ways of Christ. He learned further that their great teacher, Paul, of Tarsus, was now in Rome, imprisoned on charges preferred by the Jews and he had determined to make his acquaintance. He was most overjoyed with the additional news that the greatest of all the sect, a disciple of Christ, to whom had been confided the administration of the entire Christian world, might arrive in Rome at any moment. All the Christians were anxious to see him and to hear his teachings. There would be great gatherings, in which Chilo himself would be present. He would bring Vinitius there in disguise and they would certainly find Lygia.

If Glaucus were out of the way, there would be small peril in all this. The Christians might plan revenge, but they were usually a peaceful people.

And now Chilo began to explain with some enthusiasm that he had never found them to engage in any debauchery, nor to poison wells and fountains, nor to preach enmity to humanity, nor to worship an ass, nor to feed on the flesh of children. Nay, these things he had never seen. True, among them might be found persons who would do away with Glaucus, but their teaching, so far as he knew, would not incite them to crime. On the contrary, it commanded forgiveness even to the wronged.

Vinitius recalled what Pomponia Graecina had said to him at Actea's, and listened with delight to the words of Chilo. Though sometimes he felt that he hated Lygia, he was relieved to hear that the sect to which she and Pomponia belonged was neither criminal nor disgusting. An indescribable feeling rose within him that these unknown teachings and the mysterious reverence which they paid to Christ, created a chasm between him and Lygia. So he began to hate those teachings and to fear them.

CHAPTER XVII

Chilo did, in fact, have the intention to put Glaucus out of the way, for Glaucus, though old, was by no means decrepit. There was some slight truth in the story he told to Vinitius. He had once known Glaucus; he had betrayed him and sold him to robbers, he had caused the loss of his family and fortune and had delivered him up to murder. He could easily recall all the facts. He had left him dying, not in a tavern, but on a field near Minturnae. He had not thought at the time that Glaucus would ever recover and come to Rome. On seeing him in the church he had been terribly frightened. His first thought had been to renounce his search for Lygia. But, on the other hand, he feared Vinitius even more. When it came to a

choice between his dread of prosecution by Glaucus and of the vengeance of the mighty patrician, who would summon to his aid the still mightier Petronius, he did not long hesitate. He deemed it better to have small enemies than great ones. His cowardly nature revolted from bloodshed, but when he found that bloodshed was necessary he would shift the deed into the hands of hirelings. The important question now was that of choosing the right men for his purpose. He would give them the task of which he had spoken to Vinitius. Passing his nights in taverns among vagrants, men without home or honor or faith, he could readily find men willing for any crime. But it was still easier to find among them men who would receive his money, would promise to do the work, and then extort still further money from him on a threat of betraying him into the hands of justice. Moreover, he had long felt a repugnance for these wretched vagrants who lurked in the disreputable houses of the Suburra and the trans-Tiber. Judging all people by himself, he believed that among Christians, who seemed to him a trifle more trustworthy, he might find willing tools whom he might mislead into the idea that the work was not done merely for money, but with the aim of accomplishing some good.

Therefore he spent his evenings with Euritius, whom he knew to be devoted to him body and soul and would do anything at his bidding. With his native caution, he decided not to reveal the whole truth to him, which might prove repugnant to one so pious and full of devotion to God. He needed men who were ready for anything, but in whom he could confide only so far that they would keep his secret forever.

Euritius, after the redemption of his son, had rented a small shop, one among many, which surrounded the Circus Maximus. Here he sold olives, beans, fruit cakes and water sweetened with honey, to the people who flocked to the circus. Chilo found the old man at home, busily arranging his little shop. Greeting him in the name of Christ, he unfolded the reason of his visit, confident that

he could depend upon his gratitude for the service he had already extended. He explained that he needed two or three strong, courageous and fearless men to ward off the dangers that threatened not only himself but all Christians. Poor as he was since he had given up his all for Euritius, he still would be able to pay men of this sort for their services, but only on condition that they would trust him and do blindly whatever he commanded. Euritius and his son, Quartus, listened to him as to their benefactor. They almost dropped upon their knees when they assured him that they were ready to fulfill all his wishes, being convinced that so holy a man would not require from them anything inconsistent with the teachings of Christ. Chilo assured them that they were right. He lifted up his eyes as if in prayer. In truth he was inwardly meditating whether he would not accept their offer and keep the thousand sesterces for himself. But after a moment's thought he decided to refuse. Euritius was an old man, burdened not only by his age, but by sickness and sorrow. Quartus was but a boy of sixteen. What Chilo needed was strong and sagacious men. As to the thousand sesterces, he hoped that his elaborate scheme would enable him in any event to save the larger portion of it. The men insisted for some time that he should inform them of his wishes, but when he had firmly made up his mind to abide by his last decision, they yielded.

"Master," said Quartus, "I know a baker called Demas, who employs slaves and hired men. There is one among the hired men who is more vigorous than two or even four ordinary mortals. I myself have seen him lift stones which no four men could have lifted."

"If he be a good and pious man, willing to sacrifice himself for his brethren, you may introduce him to me."

"He is a Christian," said Quartus, "for Demas employs few except Christians. He has both night and day laborers. This man is one of the night laborers. If we go there now, we shall find them at supper, and thou wilt have a chance to talk freely with him. Demas lives near the Emporium."

Chilo joyfully consented. The Emporium lay at the foot of the Aventine Hill, but a short distance from the Circus Maximus. It could be reached without climbing the hill, by passing along the river, through the Aemilian Gate and this would shorten the journey.

"I am old," said Chilo, when they had arrived under the Colonnade, "and sometimes my memory betrays me. Yea, our Lord was betrayed by one of His disciples, but I recall not his name at this moment."

" 'Twas Judas, master. He who hanged himself," answered Quartus, wondering within himself how such a name could escape any memory.

"Yea, Judas, I thank thee," answered Chilo. They pursued their way for a time in silence. When they reached the Emporium, which they found closed, they were obliged to go around the store-houses, whence grain was distributed among the people, and then turn to the left by the houses which stretched along the Via Ostiensis up to the Mons Testacius and the Forum Pistorium. Here they stopped before a wooden building, from the interior of which issued the noise of revolving mill-stones Quartus entered, but Chilo remained outside. He did not like to show himself in a crowd, fearing that fate might bring about a meeting with Glaucus, the physician.

"I am curious to see this Hercules who works in a mill," he said to himself, looking up at the radiant moon. "If he is a clever rascal he may cost me something, but if he is an innocent Christian and a fool, he will do as I wish for nothing." He was interrupted by the return of Quartus, who came out with another man, clad only in a shirt cut in such a fashion that his right arm and right breast were exposed, so as to allow him free movement. Such shirts were generally worn by laborers. At sight of this man, Chilo looked his admiration and satisfaction. Never had he seen such an arm and such a breast. "Master," said Quartus, "here is the brother whom thou didst wish to see."

"The peace of Christ be with him," was Chilo's greeting. "Tell this brother, O Quartus, that I am trust-

worthy, and then return in the name of God, for I see no need that thou shouldst leave unprotected the home of thy wise old father."

"This is a holy man," said Quartus, "who surrendered his all to redeem me from slavery, me who was unknown to him. May our Lord and Saviour prepare a heavenly reward for him."

At these words the gigantic laborer bent and kissed the hands of Chilo.

"What is thy name?" asked the Greek.

"Father, in holy baptism, the name of Urban was given to me."

"Urban, my brother, hast thou time to speak with me freely?"

"Our work begins at midnight, and at present they are preparing supper for us."

"Ah, then, we have time enough. Let us go over to the pond, and thou wilt hear what I have to say to thee."

They wended their way thither and sat down on a stone near the embankment. The silence was broken only by the far-off sound of the mill-stone and the rippling of the waters. Chilo glanced inquiringly at the face of the laborer. That face was stern and melancholy, as was usual among the barbarians who lived in Rome, yet it was full of goodness and honesty.

"'Tis well," thought Chilo. "Here is a kindly fool who will kill Glaucus for nothing."

"Urban," he asked, "do you love Christ?"

"I love Him with all my soul and all my heart," answered the laborer.

"And thy brethren, thy sisters, and all those who taught thee the truth and faith in Christ?"

"I love them also, father."

"Then peace be with thee."

"And with thee, father."

There was silence anew, interrupted as before by the sound of the mill-stones and the rippling of the water. Chilo, eyes fixed on the moon, began in low and impressive

tones to speak about the death of Christ. He seemed not to be addressing Urban directly, but to be recalling facts that were known to both, for the benefit of the sleeping city. His words seemed so inspired and so holy that they moved the laborer to tears. When Chilo sighed and expressed his sorrow that there had been no one near the dying Christ to defend him, not only from crucifixion, but from the humiliations inflicted by the Jews and the soldiers, the gigantic fists of the barbarian were clenched in pity and anger. The death of Christ was bad enough, but the thought that the blood of the Lamb was shed amidst scoffs and jeers revolted his simple soul, and aroused in it a wild desire for vengeance. Then suddenly Chilo asked:

"Urban, dost thou know who Judas was?"

"I know, I know. He hanged himself!" cried the laborer. In his voice was immense sorrow that the traitor had punished himself, and was consequently out of his reach.

"But suppose," said Chilo, "that he did not hang himself, and that some Christian were to meet him. Would it not be a Christian duty to avenge the sufferings, the death and the blood of the Saviour?"

"Oh, father, who would not mete out this revenge?"

"Peace be with thee, oh, faithful servant of the Lamb, Yea, we may forgive our own wrongs, but who is authorized to forgive the wrongs done to God? But as serpents breed serpents, as crimes breed crimes, as traitors breed traitors, so from the venom of Judas was born another traitor. As the first Judas betrayed our Saviour to the Jews and the soldiers of Rome, so this traitor, who lives among us at present, wishes to betray the lambs of God to the wolf, and if no one prevents this—if no one crushes the head of this serpent—awful destruction awaits us all, and with us the destruction of the Holy Lamb."

The laborer glanced at him in wild excitement. He could scarce believe what he heard. The Greek covered his face with a corner of his mantle and began to repeat

in a deep voice, which seemed as if it came from the depths of the earth:

"Woe unto you, servants of the true God. Woe unto you, Christians, men and women!" And again silence followed. Again there was no sound save the revolving mill-stones, the singing of the millers, and the rippling of the waters below.

"Father," asked the laborer abruptly, "who is this traitor?"

Chilo bowed his head still lower. "Who is this traitor? A son of Judas, the spawn of his venom, who pretends to be a Christian, and visits the houses of prayer only for the purpose of betraying his brethren to Caesar, charging that they do not honor Caesar as a god, that they poison wells, that they murder children, and that they wish to hurl the city into such destruction that not one stone shall remain upon another. Look you, in a few days an order will be issued to the pretorians to imprison men, women and children, and lead them to death as they led to death the slaves of Pedanius Secundus. This is the work of our second Judas. But if the first one was never punished, if nobody took vengeance on him, if nobody averted hours of suffering from Christ, who will now take vengeance? Who now will destroy him before Caesar can hear his terrible charges? Who now will put him out of the way, and so prevent the ruin of the brethren and of the faith of Christ?"

Urban, who till now had remained seated on the stone, arose immediately and said: "I will do this, father."

Chilo also rose. He looked straight into the face of the laborer as he stood in the rays of the moonlight, then, placing his hands upon his head, he solemnly said: "Go among the Christians, go to the places of prayer, ask the brethren to point out Glaucus, the physician, and if they show him to thee, kill him!"

"Didst thou say Glaucus?" repeated the laborer, with an effort of memory to retain the name.

"Dost thou know him?"

"I know him not. There are thousands of Christians

in Rome, and they do not all know one another. But to-morrow night at Ostranium there will be a general gathering of all the brothers and sisters without a single exception, for a great Apostle of Christ will preach there, and I will ask the brethren to point out to me Glaucus."

"In Ostranium?" asked Chilo. "Why, that is outside of the gates of the city. All our brothers and sisters at night? Outside the gate at Ostranium?"

"Yea, father, our cemetery lies there, between the Salaria and Nomentana roads. Dost thou not know that the great Apostle is expected there?"

"I have been away for two days, hence I did not receive his letter, and I know not Ostranium for I only recently arrived from Corinth, where I was the head of a Christian community. But so be it. Christ will be with thee. Thou wilt go to-morrow night, my son, to Ostranium, and there thou wilt find Glaucus among the brethren. Thou wilt slay him on his way back to the city. All thy sins will be forgiven thee in return. And now, peace be with thee!"

"Father!"

"I hear thee, O, servant of the Lamb." The laborers's face expressed perplexity. He might have killed a man or two in the course of his life, but the religion of Christ forbade murder. He had not killed them in self-defense, for even this was forbidden, nor, Christ forbid! had he killed for sake of a reward. The bishop himself had given him brethren to help in a certain adventure, but had commanded him to take no life. The killing had been through inadvertence, for the Lord had punished him with extraordinary strength. And now he was doing penance for this. Others might sing while grinding wheat, he could only think on his sins and his offenses against the Lamb. How he had prayed! How he had wept! How often had he besought the Lamb for forgiveness! In spite of everything, he felt that his repentance was not yet sufficient. And now he had promised to kill a traitor! So be it. One may readily forgive trespasses against oneself, but against one-

self only. So he would kill Glaucus, even in the presence of all the brothers and sisters gathered at Ostranium. But Glaucus should be tried first before the elders selected from among the brethren by the bishop or the Apostle. To kill was no great matter and to kill a traitor was a pleasant duty, like killing a wolf or a bear. But suppose Glaucus was innocent? "How can I burden myself with a new murder, a new sin, a new offense against the Lamb?"

"There is no time for a trial, my son," answered Chilo, "for the traitor will hurry from Ostranium directly to Caesar in Antium, or hide himself in the house of a certain patrician in whose employ he now is. I will give thee a sign, which, if thou showest after killing Glaucus to the bishop or the Apostle, they will bless thee and thy deed."

With these words he took from his pocket a coin. Drawing a knife from his belt, he cut the sign of the cross upon the coin, and gave it to the laborer.

"Here is a sentence upon Glaucus and a sign for thee. When thou showest this to the bishop, he will give thee absolution, not only for the killing of Glaucus, but also for the involuntary homicides that preceded it."

The laborer hesitatingly stretched out his hand for the coin. He recalled his first homicide, and could not repress a shiver.

"Father!" he exclaimed, in a voice of entreaty, "dost thou take this upon thine own conscience, and art thou sure that Glaucus hath plotted to slay our brethren?"

Chilo saw that he must give some proofs and mention some names, otherwise doubt would arise in the mind of the laborer. A happy thought struck him. "Hearken, Urban," he said. "I dwell in Corinth, but I come from Cos. Here in Rome I am instructing in the religion of Christ, a servant girl, my countrywoman, Eunice, by name. She serves as a handmaiden in the house of a certain Petronius, a friend of Caesar. In this house I learned how Glaucus had promised to betray all the Christians, and also to betray unto a certain Vinitius another

imperial adviser, a certain maiden—" He stopped abruptly, for he had caught a strange look in the eyes of the laborer. They blazed like the eyes of a wild beast, while the whole face took on a look of wrath and menace. "What is the matter?" he asked, in some alarm.

"Nothing, father; I will kill Glaucus to-morrow." The Greek was silent. He took the laborer's arm and turned him so that the moonlight fell full upon his face, which he scrutinized carefully. Evidently he was hesitating whether to inquire further or to be content with the impression he had already made. His habitual caution gained the upper hand. Twice he sighed deeply, and again placing his hands upon the head of the laborer, he asked him in solemn tones: "The name of Urban was given thee in holy baptism?"

"Yea, father, it was."

"Then peace be with thee, Urban."

CHAPTER XVIII

Petronius to Vinitius:

It fares hardly with thee, dear friend. It would seem that Venus hath disturbed thy mind and deprived thee of reason and memory, as well as the power of thinking of aught save love. Peruse thine own answer to my letter, and thou wilt find that all is indifferent to thee save Lygia alone; that thou art occupied only with her; that she is the centre of everything. By Pollux! I trust that thou wilt find her soon, or otherwise the fire within thee will turn thee to ashes, or thou wilt transform thyself into an Egyptian Sphinx, who was enamored of the white Isis, as the story goes, and was turned deaf and dumb and indifferent to all things, awaiting only the night, when he could gaze upon her with cold and stony eyes. Disguise thyself in the evening and issue forth with thy philosopher to visit the Christian houses of prayer. All that raises hope and kills time will help thee. But, for the sake of my

friendship, do this one thing: This Ursus, the slave of Lygia, is a man of rare strength. So hire Croto and take both with thee. This will be safe and wise. The Christians, if Pomponia and Lygia belong to them, are surely not so vile as is believed. But in their capture of Lygia they gave proof that when some lamb of their flock is in danger, they know how to act. When thou seest Lygia thou wilt be unable to restrain thyself, but wilt endeavor to take her at once. But couldst thou do this with the help of Chilo alone? Croto could manage it, even if there were ten Ursuses to defend Lygia. Therefore, let not Chilo plunder thee, but lavish money on Croto. This is the best counsel that I can give thee.

The infant Augusta is forgotten here; forgotten also are the charges of witchcraft. Poppaea mentions her at times, but Caesar's thoughts are elsewhere. At all events if it be true that the divine Augusta is again in a delicate condition, the memory of the first child will disappear without leaving any trace. We have already been more than ten days in Naples, or, rather, in Baiae. If thou art still capable of thought, surely thine ears must have heard echoes of what occurs here, for it must be the general subject of talk in Rome. We came directly to Baiae, where memories of our mother revived, and the voice of conscience was heard again. But dost thou know the frame of mind to which Bronzebeard is reduced? Simply to this, that the murder of his mother has become for him only an inspiration for poetry and tragic themes. The voice of conscience spoke only to his cowardice. He soon reassured himself with the thought that the whole world was under his feet and that no god would wreak vengeance upon him. He feigns emotion only to move his auditors. Sometimes he rises at night, crying that the furies are after him. He awakens us all, gazes around at us, assumes the pose of an actor (and a bad actor at that) in the rôle of Orestes. He declaims Greek verses and watches to see if we are admiring him. And we do admire him or feign admiration. Instead of saying to him, "Back to bed, thou mountebank!" we become trage-

dians in our turn, and defend this great artist from the furies. By Castor! Thou must have heard how he has appeared in public in Naples. From the city itself and from the surrounding villages all the Greek rabble were driven into the arena, filling it with so vile an odor of perspiration and garlic that I thanked the gods that in lieu of sitting in the first rows with the Augustales, I was behind the scenes with Bronzebeard. And wilt thou believe it, he was afraid. Truly he was. He seized my hands and placed them upon his heart, which was throbbing violently. He breathed with difficulty. At the moment when he was to appear, he turned pale as parchment and on his forehead stood huge drops of sweat. Yet he knew that around all the seats were stationed pretorians armed with clubs, ready to stimulate the necessary enthusiasm. No herd of monkeys could have raised such a clatter as did this multitude. I tell thee that the smell of garlic invaded the stage. Nero bowed, pressed his hand to his heart, threw kisses and shed tears. He rushed back among us who were waiting behind the scenes, and cried like a drunken man: "What are all other triumphs compared with this of mine?" The rabble howled out their applause, knowing that it was applauding for favors, gifts, free places in the theatre, lottery tickets, and a new exhibition by Caesar, the mountebank. I marvelled not at this, for I knew that never before had they witnessed such a spectacle. And every moment, he repeated: "See what the Greeks are! See what the Greeks are!" From that evening it has seemed to me that his hatred against Rome increased. Nevertheless special messengers were dispatched to Rome to carry the news of his triumph, and we expect at any moment the thanks of the Senate. Immediately after Nero's first exhibition a strange thing happened. The theatre suddenly collapsed, but fortunately it was after the audience had left. I was there at the time, and did not see a single corpse taken from the ruins. Many among the Greeks looked upon this as a sign of anger of the gods over the disgraced imperial

dignity. Caesar asserts the contrary. He declares it to be a direct evidence of the favor of the gods, not only to his hymns but to those who listened to them. Hence thanks and sacrifices were offered up in all the temples. He desires now to set out for Achaea. Yet a few days ago he acknowledged to me that he had doubts as to what the people of Rome might say, and whether they might not rise in revolt out of love for him, and fear that the distribution of bread and the exhibition of spectacles might cease during the absence of Caesar. We are now ready to start for Beneventum to gaze upon the cobbler's paradise which Vatinius has to show. Thence we go to Greece, under the protection of the divine brothers of Helena. As to me, I recognize the truth of the proverb, that among fools it is well to be a fool, and, what is more, I find a certain charm in folly. Greece and the voyage thither in a thousand ships, a sort of triumphal procession of Bacchus, amid nymphs and bacchantes, adorned with wreaths of myrtle and vine leaves, nymphs in wagons drawn by tigers, flowers, roses, garlands, music, poetry and songs from lusty throats, and all Hellas applauding. All this is well. But we have more important projects in view. We wish to create a sort of Oriental Empire, a fairyland of palms, sunshine, poetry, and reality turned into a delicious dream, into a life of luxurious pleasure. We wish to forget Rome, to place the centre of the world somewhere between Greece, Asia and Egypt, to live the life not of men, but of gods, to forget the commonplace, to wander in golden galleries, under the shadow of purple sails in the Archipelago, to be Apollo, Osiris, and Baal in one, to be rosy in the dawn, gold in the sun and silver in the moon, to act, to sing and dream. And wilt thou believe it? I, who possess at least a farthing's worth of judgment and a groat's worth of sense, allow myself to be borne away by these fancies, and am doing this because in them is something rare and splendid. A fairyland of this sort has its charms and in future ages it will take on the aspect of a dream. Only when Venus transforms

herself into a Lygia, or even into a slave like Eunice, only when art beautifies life, is life worth living. Otherwise 'tis a grinning ape. But Bronzebeard will never realize his dream, if only for this reason, that in that Oriental fairyland he allows no place for treason, iniquity, and death, and ruling over all, in the false guise of poetry, is a common mountebank, a counterfeit charioteer, and a stupid tyrant. Meanwhile we are strangling all men who stand in our way. Poor Torquatus Silanus is now only a shadow. He had to open his veins a few days ago. Lecanius and Licinus accept the Consulate with trembling. Old Thrasea cannot escape death, for he was bold enough to be honest. Tigellinus has not yet succeeded in securing an order to make me open my veins. I am still needed, not only as an arbiter of elegance but as a man whose counsel and taste are vital for the success of the expedition to Achaea. But I often think that sooner or later this must be the end. Knowest thou what then will be my chief anxiety, that Bronzebeard should not get my magic corals, which thou knowest and admirest. Shouldst thou be near me at my last hour, I will deliver them to thee, but shouldst thou be far from me, I will break them. We now have before us, the cobbler's paradise at Beneventum, Olympian Greece, and Fate, which, unknown and invisible, points out the way to all. Be well, and hire Croto; otherwise Lygia will a second time be taken from thee. When thou hast no further need for the services of Chilo, send him to me wherever I may be. Perchance I may succeed in making of him a second Vatinius. Consuls and Senators may tremble before him yet, as they trembled before the hero, Dratevka. Ah, it would be worth while to see this! When thou hast found Lygia, let me know, that I may sacrifice a pair of swans and a pair of doves in our round Temple of Venus. Once in my dreams I saw Lygia on thy knee, seeking for kisses. Strive to make this dream a reality. In your heaven may there be no clouds, or, if some there be, may they have the color and the odor of roses. Be in good health and happiness.

CHAPTER XIX

Vinitius had just finished reading this letter when Chilo crept into the library, cautiously and unannounced, for the slaves had orders to admit him at any hour of the day or night.

"May the divine mother of thy noble ancestor show such favor to thee as the divine son of Maia hath shown to me."

"What meanest thou?" exclaimed Vinitius, springing from the table on which he was seated.

"Eureka!" cried Chilo, proudly.

The young patrician fell back upon his chair; for some moments excitement prevented his speaking.

"Hast thou seen her?" he asked at last.

"Master, I have seen Ursus, and have held converse with him."

"Speak then. Knowest thou where they are hidden?"

"Nay, master; another man might have informed the Lygian that his identity was known to him, might have revealed his own name, and sought information as to where the maiden lived. But what would his answer have been? Perchance a blow from that mighty fist full in the face, which would have made him indifferent to all worldly things. At all events, he would have raised suspicion in the mind of the maiden's guardian, which would have led to an immediate change in her hiding place. Master, I did not act thus. Sufficient was it for me to know that Ursus is a night laborer in the mill of one Demas, the same name as that of thy freedman. This, I say, sufficed. For now it were easy for some one of thy slaves to follow him in the morning and learn their hiding place. I am certain that if Ursus is here, Lygia is also in Rome. And for further news, I bring assurance that both will be present to-night at a gathering in Ostranium."

"Ostranium! Where is that?" interrupted Vinitius. "I also wish to be present there."

" 'Tis an old cemetery between the Salaria and Nomentana roads. The chief priest of the Christians, of whom I have spoken to thee, and who has long been expected, has arrived, and will preach in this cemetery to-night. They conceal their religion, for though there is no edict against it, yet the people hate them, and therefore it behooves them to be cautious. This same Ursus has told me that all, even to the last soul, would gather in Ostranium, for all wish to see and hear him who was the foremost disciple of Christ, and who is called an Apostle. As they consider women equal to men, women also will be there, save only Pomponia, who might find it difficult to explain her absence to Aulus, a believer in the ancient gods. But Lygia, master, who is under the guardianship of Ursus and the elders of the community, will surely be there with the other women."

Vinitius, who had been living in a state of feverish excitement, upheld only by hope, now that this hope seemed about to be realized, was suddenly attacked with weakness, such as a man feels after a long journey. Chilo marked this, and resolved to take advantage of it.

"The gates are watched by thy slaves, and the Christians must know this. But they do not need to go through the gates. The Tiber has no gates, and though it is far from the river to the appointed place, still for them it is worth while to get there in order to see the 'Great Apostle.' Besides, they have probably a thousand ways of reaching the spot. In Ostranium, master, thou wilt find Lygia. If she be not there, which is not unlikely, thou wilt find Ursus, for he has promised to kill Glaucus. He himself told me that he would be there, and that he would kill him. Dost thou hear, my golden Tribune? Then thou wilt either follow Ursus, and so come to the place where Lygia dwells, or thou wilt command thy slaves to seize him as a murderer, bind his hands and make him confess where he has hidden Lygia. I have completed my task. Another, oh, master, would have told thee a story that he had drunk

ten goblets of the best wine with Ursus before he could get the secret out of him; another would have said that he had lost a thousand sesterces to him in gambling, or that he had bought his information for two thousand. I know that thou wilt pay me doubly, for the noble Petronius has told me that thy bounty will exceed my hopes."

Vinitius, though a soldier, accustomed to weigh well every action as well as to act, was possessed by a sudden weakness, and said:

"Thou shalt not rely upon my generosity in vain, but first thou wilt accompany me to Ostranium."

"I to Ostranium?" asked Chilo, who had no desire to go thither. "Noble Tribune, I engaged to find Lygia for thee, but I did not engage to carry her off for thee. Think, master, what would happen to me. If that Lygian bear, after killing Glaucus, should comprehend that he did not deserve death, would he not regard me as the cause of an unjust murder? Forget not, master, that the greater the philosopher the more difficult it is for him to answer the stupid questions of a fool. What should I answer him if he asked me why I slandered Glaucus, the physician? If thou distrust me, then, I say, pay me only when I show thee the house where Lygia lives. Give me to-day but a part of my remuneration, so that if any accident should befall thee (whom may all the gods protect), I would not be left without any recompense. Thy heart could not endure that."

Vinitius went to a casket that stood on a marble pedestal, took a purse from it, and flung it to Chilo.

"These are silver," he said, "and when Lygia shall be in my house thou wilt get the same filled with gold."

"Thou art a very Jove!" exclaimed Chilo.

Vinitius frowned. "Thou wilt refresh thyself, and afterwards thou mayest rest! But until evening thou must remain here, and when night comes thou wilt accompany me to Ostranium."

A look of alarm and uncertainty flitted over the face of the Greek. He controlled himself, however, and answered:

"Who can oppose thee, master! These silver pieces overweigh my services, to say nothing of thy society, which to me is a happiness and a delight."

Vinitius interrupted him impatiently, and questioned him as to the particulars of his conversation with Ursus. It seemed clear that they would be able to discover Lygia's hiding place that night, or to seize her on the way back from Ostranium. This thought filled Vinitius with wild delight. Now he felt confident of finding Lygia, his anger and vexation against her disappeared. In his joy he forgave her everything. He thought of her only as one dear to him; he felt as if she were returning after a long absence. He would fain have called his slaves and ordered them to deck his house with garlands. He felt no anger even against Ursus at the moment. He was ready to forgive everything to everybody. Chilo, for whom, in spite of his services, he had always felt aversion, seemed to him now an entertaining and an unusual person. Joy filled his house. His eyes and face grew radiant. He felt again youth and the delight of life. The sufferings he had gone through were not as great as his love for Lygia. This he understood now for the first time, when he hoped to possess her. His desires woke up in him as the earth wakes in the springtime beneath the glow of the sun; but now his desires were less wild and blind than formerly, and had more of happiness and tenderness. He felt within himself unlimited energy, and was confident that when he saw Lygia with his own eyes, he would take her from all the Christians in the world, or from Caesar himself.

Chilo, meanwhile, reassured by the delight of Vinitius, began to offer advice. He warned Vinitius that victory was not yet won, and that the greatest caution was necessary or all would be brought to naught. He besought Vinitius not to attempt to take Lygia from Ostranium. They should go there with hoods on their heads and with their faces concealed. They should hide in dark corners, whence they might scrutinize people as they passed. When they saw Lygia it would be

best to follow at a distance, to mark the house she entered and on the morrow to surround it with a large force, and take her away at daybreak. Since she belonged to Caesar, as a hostage, all this might be done without offending against the law. Should they not find her in Ostranium, they would follow Ursus. The result would be the same. It would be impracticable to go to the cemetery with a crowd of attendants, for thus attention would be attracted. The Christians would extinguish all the lights, as they had done at the time of Lygia's rescue, and, scattering in the darkness, would conceal themselves in places known only to them. "But it is necessary that we should go armed and should take with us a couple of strong and trustworthy men to defend us in case of need."

Vinitius acknowledged the wisdom of this advice. Recalling Petronius's counsel, he ordered his slaves to bring Croto to him. Chilo, who knew everybody in Rome, felt greatly relieved on hearing the name of the famous athlete, whose superhuman strength he had admired many times in the arena. He rejoiced to hear that he would accompany them to Ostranium. The purse filled with gold would be easier to acquire with the aid of Croto.

Hence he sat down in cheerful mood at the table, to which he was summoned by the chief of the hall. He informed the slaves that he had brought their master a magic ointment. It was only necessary to rub it upon the hoofs of the worst horses to make them outstrip all others. A certain Christian had shown him how to prepare the ointment. The Christians were better skilled in magic and miracles than even the Thessalonians, though Thessaly was renowned for its wonder workers. The Christians had great confidence in him. Any one could understand the reason of this, who knows what means the sign of the fish. While speaking, he warily watched the faces of the slaves, in the hope of discovering a Christian, and betraying him to Vinitius. He ate and drank more freely than usual, and showered praises on the cook, saying that

he would try to buy his freedom from Vinitius. His joy was clouded only by the thought that he must go that night to Ostranium, but he took comfort in the fact that he would go in disguise and in the company of two men, one a giant admired by all Rome, and the other a patrician, a high officer in the army.

"If they discover Vinitius," he said to himself, "they will not dare to lay hands on him. As for myself, they will be sharp-eyed indeed if they see even the tip of my nose."

He recalled his conversation with the laborer. The recollection brought much joy to him. Beyond a doubt that laborer was Ursus. From what Vinitius had said and from the account of those who had brought Lygia from Caesar's palace, he knew of the man's wonderful strength. The confusion and wrath of the laborer at the mention of Vinitius and Lygia confirmed his suspicion that the giant was interested in these persons. The laborer had mentioned also his penance for killing a man. Now Ursus had killed Atacinus. Moreover, the appearance of the laborer corresponded to the account which Vinitius had given of the Lygian. The difference of name was the only thing that could raise a doubt, but Chilo knew that Christians often assumed new names at baptism.

"Should Ursus kill Glaucus," meditated Chilo, "that will be all the better; but should he not kill him it will be proof of how difficult it is for a Christian to commit murder. I pictured this Glaucus as a son of Judas and as a betrayer of Christians. I was so eloquent that even a stone would have been moved and would have promised to fall upon the head of Glaucus. But I hardly persuaded that Lygian bear to put his paws on him. He hesitated and spoke of penance and compunction; evidently murder is not pleasing to them. They are obliged to forgive offenses against themselves and they are not allowed to revenge the wrongs of others. Therefore, stop and think, Chilo, what can threaten thee? Revenge is not allowed to Glaucus. If Ursus will not kill Glaucus for such a

heinous crime as the betrayal of all the Christians, he will not kill thee for the small offense of betraying one Christian. Moreover, when I have discovered to this lustful vulture the nest of the turtle dove, I will wash my hands of everything, and will betake myself to Naples. The Christians speak also of a kind of washing of the hands. It is evidently a ceremony to indicate that any transaction with them has come to an end. What good people these Christians are, and how they are maligned! Oh, gods! such is the justice of the world. I have a regard for the Christian teaching because it does not allow killing. But if to kill is forbidden, to steal, to cheat, or to bear false witness are also surely forbidden, hence the teachings are hard to live up to. The Christian religion evidently teaches that people should die honestly, as the Stoics teach, at the same time it teaches that they should also live honestly. If ever I acquire a fortune and a house like this, and as many slaves, perhaps I shall be a Christian as long as it is convenient, for a rich man can indulge himself in everything, even in honesty and virtue. Yea! this is a religion for the rich man, and I do not understand why so many poor embrace it. What use is it to them to be honest, and thus to tie their hands? I must ponder this some time more carefully. At this moment I must thank thee, oh, Hermes, for helping me to find this Lygia. But if thou hast done so for the two white yearlings with gilded horns, thou art fooled. Shame on thee, murderer of Argos, that so clever a god as thou did not foresee that thou wouldst get nothing. I offer thee my gratitude. If thou preferest two beasts to it, thou thyself art a beast rather than a god. Beware lest I, a great philosopher, should prove to the world that thou dost not exist, then all would cease to offer sacrifices. It is best always to be on good terms with philosophers."

Speaking thus to himself and to Hermes, he stretched himself on a couch, placed his mantle under his head and fell asleep, while the slaves were clearing the table. He awoke, or rather was awakened by the arrival of Croto. He arose at once, went into the hall and gazed with delight

at the huge figure of the ex-gladiator, who seemed to fill the entire place. Croto was talking to Vinitius.

"By Hercules! it is well, master, that thou didst send for me to-day, as to-morrow I start for Beneventum, whither the noble Vatinius has summoned me to fight before Caesar, with a certain Syphax, the most powerful negro in Africa. Thou canst imagine, master, how his bones will crack in my hands, and how I shall smash his black jaw with my fist."

"By Pollux!" answered Vinitius, "I am sure that thou wilt do that."

"So say I," added Chilo. "Yes, smash his jaws; that is an excellent idea and a worthy deed. I am ready to bet that thou wilt smash his jaws, but rub thy limbs to-day with olive oil, my Hercules, and eat well and then I am sure that thou canst fight even Caucus. The man who guards the girl in whom the lordly Vinitius is concerned possesses extraordinary strength."

Chilo spoke thus in order to rouse Croto's ambition. And Vinitius added:

"It is true. I have not seen him, but I am told that he can drag a bull by the horns where he pleases."

"Oi!" exclaimed Chilo, who had not imagined Ursus was so powerful.

But Croto laughed in scorn. "I undertake, worthy master," said he, "to finish with this fist him of whom ye speak, and with this other to defend myself against seven such Lygians and to bring the girl to thy home though all the Christians were pursuing me like Calabrian wolves. If I do not fulfill my promise may I be beaten with clubs in this very hall."

"Do not allow that, master," cried Chilo. "If they begin to throw stones at us what help would his strength be? Would it not be better to abduct the girl from the house without exposing her or ourselves to danger?"

"He speaks wisely, Croto," said Vinitius.

"Thy money, thy will; remember only, master, that to-morrow I go to Beneventum."

"I have five hundred slaves in the city," answered

Vinitius. Then he gave a sign to them to retire, and going into the library he wrote the following note to Petronius:

"Chilo has found the Lygian this evening. I go with him and Croto to Ostranium; I shall take her from her lodging to-morrow; may the gods favor us! Good health to you, dear friend. Joy does not allow me to write further."

Laying aside the pen, he walked up and down with rapid strides; for, besides joy, which filled his soul, impatience burned in him like fire. He said to himself that to-morrow Lygia would be in his house. He did not know exactly what course to take with her, but he felt that he loved her and was ready to be her slave. He called to mind Actea's assurance that he was beloved by her, and this excited him greatly. He needed only to conquer her modesty and to go through certain ceremonies which Christian teaching required. When this had taken place and Lygia had entered his home, she would yield to his caresses, and she would have to say to herself, "I am conquered," and then she would be submissive and loving.

The coming of Chilo interrupted him in his delightful day dream.

"Master," said the Greek, "an idea has come to my head. Have not the Christians certain passwords, without which no one can gain entrance to Ostranium? This is the case I know in the houses of prayer, and I can get those passwords from Euritius. Permit me to go to him, master, to procure such signs as will be necessary."

"Well, noble philosopher," answered Vinitius joyfully, "thou speakest like a prudent man and for that my thanks belong to thee. Thou wilt go then to Euritius, or wherever it may please thee, but for security, thou wilt leave on this table the purse which thou hast received from me."

Chilo hated to part with money. Though not at all pleased with the order, he nevertheless complied with it and went out. From the Carinae to the Circus, near

which was the shop of Euritius, was not very far, so he returned before evening.

"I have learned all the passwords, master. Without them we could not be admitted. I inquired minutely also about the road, I explained to Euritius that I needed the passwords for some friends, saying that I could not go myself, since the journey was too long for an old man to take, and that, anyway, I should see the 'Great Apostle' on the morrow, and he would repeat to me the more important parts of his sermon."

"How is that? Thou wilt not go? Thou must go!" exclaimed Vinitius.

"I know that I must go; but I shall put a hood on my head, and I advise thee to do likewise, lest we frighten the prey."

Soon they began to prepare themselves, for darkness was covering the world. They donned Gallic mantles with hoods, and took lanterns. Vinitius armed himself and his companions with short knives; Chilo put on a wig which he had procured from a barber, and they hurried out to reach the Nomentan gates before they were closed.

CHAPTER XX

They traversed the Patrician quarter along the Viminal and passed through the former Viminal gate, in the neighborhood of the plain where Diocletian afterwards erected magnificent baths. They passed the remains of the wall of Servius Tullius and through other greater ruins until they reached the Nomentan road. Thence they turned to the left towards the Salaria road, to find themselves in the midst of hills full of sand-pits, and here and there a graveyard. Meanwhile it had grown quite dark. The moon had not risen, and but for the Christians, who showed them the way, it would have been a difficult task for them to find the road. This Chilo had foreseen. At right and left, and in front, dark figures were discernible

moving towards the sandy pits. Some carried lanterns, hiding them as much as possible under their mantles; others better acquainted with the road, walked in the dark. The trained soldier's eye of Vinitius, distinguished by their movements the young from the old ones, who walked with staffs, and from women carefully wrapped up in long mantles. The rural police, and the country people, returning from the city took these nocturnal wanderers for laborers to the sand-pits; or for some brotherhood of gravediggers whose members chose for themselves certain hours to celebrate their nightly ceremonies. But as the young patrician and his companions pushed their way onwards, the number of people and of gleaming lanterns around them increased. Some sang hymns in a subdued tone, which appeared to Vinitius full of melancholy longing. At moments his ear caught disconnected words or phrases, such as "Arise, oh thou that sleepest," or, "Rise from the dead." At times, again, the name of Christ was repeated by men and women.

Vinitius gave little heed to the words, for it crossed his mind that one of those dark figures might be Lygia. Some passing near him said: "Peace be with thee!" or "Praise be to Christ!" But restlessness had taken hold of him and his heart began to beat more quickly, for it seemed to him that he heard the voice of Lygia. Shapes or movements like hers deceived him every moment. Not until after repeated mistakes did he begin to mistrust his own eyes.

But the way appeared long to him. He was well acquainted with the surroundings, yet he could not recognize places in the darkness. Every moment they struck some narrow passage, some parts of a wall, some booth, which was strange to him. At last the edge of the moon emerged from behind a bank of clouds and illuminated the situation better than the dim lanterns. Something like a fire or the flame of a torch began to glimmer in the distance. Vinitius turned to Chilo and asked whether that were Ostranium.

Chilo, on whom the night, the distance from the city,

the phantom-like figures had made a deep impression, replied in uncertain tones:

"I know not, master; I have never been in Ostranium, but they might find some place nearer the city."

Then feeling the need of conversation to reinforce his failing courage, he added:

"They assemble like murderers, yet murder is forbidden to them, unless that Lygian giant deceived me scurvily."

Vinitius, who was thinking of Lygia, was also astonished at the caution and secrecy with which her fellow-worshippers gathered together to listen to their high priest.

"Like all religions," he said, "this also has amongst us its adherents. But the Christians are a Jewish sect. Why, then, do they gather here when in the Trans-Tiber stand Jewish sanctuaries, whereto the Jews bring offerings in bright daylight?"

"Nay, master; the Jews are their most relentless enemies. It has been related me how, even before the time of the present Caesar a war came near breaking between the Jews and them. These commotions annoyed Claudius Caesar so much that he expelled all the Jews. But now that edict has been abrogated. Still Christians hide themselves from the Jews and from the people, who, as thou knowest, accuse them of heinous crimes."

For a while they walked on in silence. The first to break it was Chilo, whose fear increased the farther the gates were left behind.

"When I returned from Euritius," he said, "I borrowed a wig from a barber, and I inserted two beans in my nostrils. They ought not to be able to recognize me. But even if they do, they will not kill me. They are not bad people. They are even very upright. I love and esteem them."

"Deal in no premature praises," answered Vinitius.

They now came to a narrow declivity closed in at the sides by two ditches, over one part of which an aqueduct was thrown. Just then the moon peeped out through the clouds. At the end of the declivity they observed a wall

covered abundantly with ivy, upon which the moon shed a silvery light. That was Ostranium.

Vinitius's heart beat more quickly than ever. At the gate two quarrymen accepted the watchwords. Next moment Vinitius and his companions found themselves in a large space entirely surrounded by a wall.

Here and there stood individual monuments and in the centre rose a crypt. In the lower part of the crypt, underground, were graves. A fountain played in front of the entrance. As the crypt was too small for so large an assemblage, Vinitius readily divined that the ceremony would be held in the open air, above, where a great multitude had already gathered. As far as eye could reach, lantern gleamed beside lantern. Many of those present, however, had no light. Save for a few bare heads all were hooded, as a precaution against treachery or cold. The young patrician grew alarmed at the thought that if they should remain thus to the end he would not be able to recognize Lygia by the dim light in that multitude.

Suddenly near the crypt some pitch torches were lighted, and placed together in a little pile. There was now sufficient light. Soon the crowd began to chant, in low tones at first, then louder and louder.

Never in his life had Vinitius heard such a hymn. The same wild longing which had moved him when he heard the hymns sung by a few passers on his way to the cemetery underlay this hymn, only far more distinct and potent, until at last it swelled into so vast a volume that it seemed as if the cemetery, the hills, the pits, the entire neighborhood, in short, had joined the multitude in their lamentations.

Almost it seemed as if a cry had gone up from the night, an humble prayer for salvation from a wanderer in the darkness. Eyes lifted heavenward seemed to be fixed upon some being above, outstretched hands implored that being to descend. When the hymn ceased, there followed a moment of hushed expectation, so overpowering that Vinitius and his followers unconsciously imitated the

Christians in casting their eyes towards the stars as if fearful that something extraordinary would happen, and that some one in reality would descend among them.

In Asia Minor, in Egypt, and in the very city of Rome, Vinitius had seen all varieties of temples. He knew many religions. He had heard many hymns. But now for the first time he beheld people calling upon a divinity with hymns, not because they were fulfilling some established ritual, but from the very depth of the heart, with such genuine yearning as children might express for a father or mother. No person not blind could help perceiving that these people not only adored their God, but loved Him with their whole souls. Vinitius had never before witnessed a scene like this in any land, in any religion, or in any temple. In Rome or in Greece there were those who still worshipped the gods from selfish motives or from fear; but love for the gods never entered their heads. Though the mind of Vinitius was occupied with looking for Lygia in the crowd, he could not help seeing the extraordinary things that were happening about him. Meanwhile the fire, fed by more torches, filled the cemetery with a red glare, darkening the gleam of the lanterns. At that moment a venerable man emerged from the crypt, arrayed in a hooded mantle, but with his head uncovered. He mounted a rock which was nearby the fire.

The crowds swayed at sight of him. About him Vinitius heard voices whispering "Peter! Peter!" Some knelt down; others stretched out their hands to him. A silence so profound followed that one could hear the falling cinders on the embers, the distant rumbling of wheels on the Via Nomentana, and the soughing of the wind through the sparse pine trees growing near the cemetery.

Chilo inclined towards Vinitius and whispered:

"That is he! The foremost disciple of Christ—a fisherman!"

The old man lifted up his hands and blessed the assembled crowds with the sign of the cross. All fell upon their knees. Lest they should betray themselves, Vinitius and his companions also fell on their knees. Vini-

tius could not grasp the situation at once. It seemed to him that the figure which he saw before him was simple yet impressive, and, moreover, it was impressive because of its simplicity. The old man had neither mitre nor garland of oak leaves on his head, nor palm branch in his hand, nor golden tablet on his breast. He was arrayed in no star-embroidered robe of white. In short, he had none of the insignia which distinguished the priests of Egypt and Greece and Rome. Vinitius was again struck by the same difference which he had felt when he listened to the Christian hymns. For the fisherman appeared to him unlike a high priest versed in liturgical ceremonies, but a simple and most venerable witness, who had travelled far and wide that he might tell some truth which he had seen and touched, which he believed with the faith that comes from actual seeing, and which he had come to love on account of his firm belief. Such conviction was depicted in his face as truth alone can possess. The sceptical Vinitius had no wish to be influenced by the teachings of the old man, but he had a feverish curiosity to know what would follow from the lips of that companion of the mysterious Christ, and what that teaching was which Lygia and Pomponia Graecina professed.

And now Peter began to speak. First he spoke as a father who points out to his children the way they should live. He commanded them to renounce all excesses and luxurious living, to love poverty, purity and truth; to suffer wrongs and persecutions with patience; to obey those in authority; to beware of treason, deceit and calumny. Finally, to give an example to one another, and even to pagans.

Vinitius, for whom good was only that which could restore to him Lygia, and bad everything which formed an obstacle between them, was angered at certain portions of the fisherman's discourse; for it seemed to him that when he enjoined purity and a struggle against natural desires, the old man dared not only to condemn his love, but also to confirm Lygia in her opposition to him. If she were among the congregation, he thought, listening to those

words and taking them to heart, she must regard him as an enemy to that teaching and as an evil man. The thought angered him. "What have I heard which is new?" he asked himself. "Is this the unknown religion? Everybody knows its teachings, everybody has heard them. Poverty and limitation of necessities have been taught by the Cynics. Socrates teaches virtue; every Stoic, even such an one as Seneca, who has five hundred tables of lemon wood, enjoins moderation, advocates truth, patience in adversity, and endurance in misfortune. All such teachings are like stale grain, fit for mice to eat, but not for men, because musty with age." Besides being angry, Vinitius was disappointed, for he had expected that some secret of magic would be revealed, and he at least expected to hear some uncommon eloquence. Instead he heard plain, simple speech devoid of all rhetorical display. He was surprised only by the silence and attention paid by the audience to the discourse.

The old man continued to address his attentive auditors, admonishing them to be good, peaceful, upright and pure; not that they might have peace in this life, but that after death they might live with Christ to everlasting, in such joy and glory as none on earth had ever attained. And here Vinitius, though of a hostile mind, could not but observe that there was a difference between the teachings of the old man and that of the Cynics, Stoics, and other philosophers; for these recommend virtue as reasonable, but practicable only in this life, whilst he promised immortality, and not a mean immortality upon the earth in wretchedness and want, but a glorious life equal almost to that of the gods. Virtue, through a faith like this, assumed priceless value, and the misfortunes of this life became trivial. For to suffer for the time being for the sake of untold happiness is something entirely different from suffering only because such is the course of nature. Continuing his discourse, the old man said that virtue and truth should be loved for themselves since the highest truth and virtue existing eternally is God himself; hence

he more one loves them the more he loves God, and becomes thus the beloved child of God.

Vinitius did not comprehend this very well, but he knew from words spoken by Pomponia Graecina to Petronius that, according to the Christian belief, God was one and almighty; when therefore he now heard that He was also all-good and all-just, he could not help thinking that in the presence of such a God, Jupiter, Saturn, Apollo, Juno, Vesta, and Venus would seem like a vain and quarrelsome crowd, where each one was for himself and against all the others. The young man's astonishment was greatest when the old man declared that God is equally universal love; hence whoever loves mankind fulfills God's greatest commandment. But it is not sufficient to love only the people of one's own nation, for the God-man shed his blood for all, and had already found among the pagans such elect as Cornelius the centurion. Again, it was not sufficient to love only those who do good to us, for Christ forgave the Jews who delivered him over to death, and the Roman soldiers who crucified him. It behooves us, therefore, not only to forgive those who wrong us, but to love them and return them good for evil. It is not enough to love those who do good, we must love the wicked also, since by love only is it possible to expel evil from them.

At these words Chilo bethought himself that all his work had gone for nothing and that Ursus would not dare to kill Glaucus either on this or any other night. On the other hand he was comforted by an inference from the old man's words that Glaucus would not kill him even if he were discovered and recognized.

Vinitius no longer thought that there was nothing new in the teachings of the old man. He asked himself with amazement, "What sort of God is this? What sort of religion, what sort of people?" All that he had just heard could not find lodgment at once in his mind. It was a jumble of new ideas. He felt that should he wish, for example, to embrace such doctrine he would have to

sacrifice on a burning pile all his former thoughts, habits, character, and his very nature itself; that they would have to be burned to ashes, so that he might then fill himself with a new life and soul. The teaching which enjoined him to love Parthians, Syricians, Greeks, Egyptians, Gauls, and Britons, to forgive enemies, to love them and to return good for evil, seemed to him nothing short of madness, yet there was something in that madness greater than all philosophy. He thought that the doctrine, in spite of its madness, was impracticable, but because impracticable, it was divine. In his heart he rejected it and felt as if he were emerging from a meadow full of flowers breathing a perfume which intoxicated, which, when a man once inhaled he must, as in the land of the lotus, forget all else and yearn for it alone. It seemed to him that in the religion there was nothing real, but that at the same time reality compared to it seemed insignificant and undeserving of thought. Heights of some kind, unthought of before, surrounded his mind, certain immensities topped with clouds. The cemetery seemed to him a rendezvous of madmen, but also a place mysterious and wonderful, where, as on some veiled bed something was being born, the like of which the world had never seen before. There passed before his mind everything that the old man had said concerning life, truth, love, and God; and his thoughts were dazed from the brilliant light, as are eyes from successive flashes of lightning. As is usual with people absorbed by a single passion, these thoughts came to him through the medium of his love for Lygia, and by these lightning flashes he saw one thing clearly, that if Lygia were present in the cemetery, she professed and obeyed that religion, and would never be his mistress. For the first time since he had met her at Aulus's house, Vinitius felt that though he had now found her, she had not found him. No thought like this had come to him before, and he could not explain it to himself at the time why he had a confused feeling of irreparable loss and misfortune. He became alarmed, and his alarm soon changed into a tempest of wrath towards all Christians,

and especially towards the old man. That fisherman, whom at the first glance he had considered an ignorant peasant, now filled him with vague alarm, and appeared to him as some mysterious power who held his fate in his hands.

The quarrymen again quietly placed fresh torches on the fire. The wind ceased to mourn in the pines. The flames rose evenly, ascending upwards towards the stars twinkling in a clear sky. The old man, recalling the death of Christ, talked now only of Him. All held their breath, and the deepest silence prevailed, so that almost could be heard the beating of hearts. The man had seen; and he narrated as one in whose mind every moment had been so fixed that were he to close his eyes he would still see. He told them how on their return from the cross he had sat with John for two days and two nights in the supper chamber without eating or sleeping, in suffering, mourning, and alarm, their heads bowed in their hands, and thinking that He had died. Oh, how terrible, how awful it was! The third day had dawned, and the morning light illumined the walls, but he and John still were sitting in the chamber, hopeless and comfortless. How desire for sleep tortured them, for they had spent the night preceding the Passion without sleep. They bestirred themselves and began to weep anew. But just as the sun rose Mary Magdalene rushed in breathless, her hair dishevelled, crying, "They have taken away the Lord!" Hearing this they sprang up and ran towards the sepulchre, but John, who was a younger man, ran faster and was the first to arrive. He saw that the place was empty, and dared not enter. Only when there were three at the entrance did he, the one now addressing them, enter; and on the stone he espied a shirt and a winding sheet. But the body they found not. Then a fear fell upon them, for they thought that the priests had removed the body of Christ, and they returned in greater grief than they had come. Other disciples arrived later and joined in the lamentations, so that the Lord of Hosts might hear them in chorus. They wept until the spirit died within

them, for they had hoped that the Master would redeem Israel, and it was now the third day since He died; they therefore did not understand why the Father had forsaken the Son and they preferred not to look at the daylight, but to die, so heavy was their burden. The remembrance of those awful moments caused two tears to flow from the eyes of the venerable man. These were visible in the light of the fire as they trickled down his gray beard. His bald and aged head trembled and his voice was choked.

Vinitius said within himself, "This man speaks the truth and it moves him to tears." The simple-hearted auditors were greatly affected. They had heard more than once of Christ's Passion, and they knew that joy would follow sorrow; but now that an Apostle, an eyewitness, retold the story, they wrung their hands, and sobbed and beat their breasts. But they calmed themselves by degrees, for the desire to hear the continuation of the story prevailed over their grief. The old man closed his eyes as if to look more carefully into his soul for the things that had happened in the past and continued:

"While the disciples were lamenting, Mary Magdalene rushed in again, proclaiming that she had seen the Lord. Failing to recognize Him because of a great light that surrounded Him she had thought Him to be the gardener. But He said 'Mary,' and she cried 'Rabboni' and fell at His feet. He bade her go to His disciples. Then He vanished. But the disciples would not believe her. When she wept for joy, some taunted her, others thought that sorrow had overthrown her mind, for she said also that she had seen angels at the grave. They ran therefore a second time to the grave and found it empty. Later in the evening came Cleopas with another from Emmaus, saying 'Truly the Lord has arisen from the dead.' And from fear of the Jews they discussed the subject with closed doors. Suddenly He stood among them, though there had been no sound at the door, and when they were afraid He said 'Peace be with you.'

. . . . . .

"And I saw Him as all did see, and He was like a light, and like the joy in our hearts, for we believed that He had arisen from the dead, and that the seas would dry up and the mountains turn to dust, but His glory would never pass."

. . . . . .

"After eight days Thomas thrust his finger in His wounds and touched His side. Then he fell at His feet and cried, 'My Lord and my God!' To whom the Lord answered 'Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed; blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.' And we heard those words and our eyes looked on Him for He was among us."

Vinitius listened and a strange thing happened to him. For the moment he forgot where he was. The feeling of reality, of comparison, of judgment, began to slip away from him. Two impossibilities faced him. He could not believe what he heard, and yet he felt that one must be blind or lost to reason who would admit that that man who said "I have seen" was lying. There was something in his gestures, in his tears, in his whole figure, and in the details of his narrative, that made it impossible to suspect him. Vinitius felt as if in a dream. But round about was the silent crowd. The odor of smoking lanterns came to his nostrils. In the distance the torches blazed and at his side, on the rock, stood this old man on the verge of the grave, his head shaking, who, giving testimony, repeated "I saw."

And he told them everything up to the Ascension into heaven. At moments he paused, for he spoke very minutely, but it was felt that every circumstance had fixed itself in his memory as though engraved on stone. The listeners were seized with ecstasy; they drew back their hoods from their heads that they might hear him better and miss not a single word of those priceless utterances. To them it seemed that some supernatural power had carried them to Galilee, and that with the disciples they were walking through the valleys and upon the waters.

The cemetery was metamorphosed into the lake of Tiberius. On the bank in the morning mist stood Christ, as He had stood when John, looking up from the boat, said, "It is the Lord"; and when Peter threw himself into the water and swam so as sooner to fall at the well-beloved feet. In the faces of all shone boundless ecstasy, forgetfulness of life, happiness, and immeasurable love. It was evident that during Peter's long exhortation some of the listeners had visions. When he began to relate how, at the moment of the Ascension, the clouds closed in beneath the Saviour's feet, how they enveloped Him, how they hid Him from the gaze of the Apostles, all eyes were raised involuntarily to the sky and a moment as of expectation followed, as if all hoped to behold Him there, or as if they expected that He would descend again from the heavens so that He might see how the venerable Apostle was tending the flock which had been entrusted to him, and bless both the lambs and him.

And for this people, at that moment, there existed neither Rome, nor the mad Caesar, nor temples of pagan gods. There was only Christ, who filled the land, the sea, the heavens, and the world.

From about the houses scattered along the Via Nomentana, the cocks began to crow announcing the midnight hour. Just then Chilo tugged at a corner of Vinitius's mantle and whispered:

"Master, over there not far from the old man I see Urban, and by his side is one that looks like a maiden."

Vinitius shook himself as though waking from a dream. He turned in the direction pointed out by the Greek and beheld Lygia.

CHAPTER XXI

At that sight the blood coursed madly through the veins of the young patrician. The crowd, the old man, his own bewilderment at the marvellous things he had heard, all

these were forgotten. The maiden alone remained. At last he had found her to whom he had devoted long days of agony, anxiety, alarm. Joy seemed to leap upon his heart like a wild beast and clutch it until breath failed him. He who had formerly held that it was the mission of the goddess of fortune to do all his behests, now could hardly believe his eyes or realize his own happiness. Had it not been for this his unruly nature might have hurried him on to some rash deed. But now he paused to make sure that this was not one of those miracles which filled his brain, that it was not a dream. No! he could doubt no longer. It was Lygia who stood before him, only a few steps away. She stood in the glare of a torch so that her full beauty was revealed to him. Her hood had fallen away from her head, her hair was dishevelled, her lips were slightly parted, her eyes were raised towards the Apostle and her whole attitude was one of rapt attention. She was dressed in the cheap garb of the working classes, but never had she seemed more beautiful to Vinitius. Despite the tumult in his soul, he was struck with the contrast between that noble patrician head and that dark mantle of coarse woolen stuff. Love burned in him like a flame, mingled with wild yearning, with honor, reverence and desire. He felt a delight as of life giving water after prolonged thirst. By the side of the Lygian giant she seemed smaller than ever, almost like a child. He noticed, also, that she had grown thinner. Her skin had a wax-like transparency. She affected him like a flower or a phantom. But the more he gazed the greater grew his desire to possess that maiden so different from all the women of Rome or of the East whom he had ever seen or possessed. Gladly would he have given them all up for her and given up also Rome and the world.

He lost consciousness of his surroundings. But Chilo, fearing that he might do something to betray them, brought him back to reality by a tug at his mantle. And now the Christians lifted up their voices in prayer and hymn. "The Lord hath come!" they thundered out. Then the great Apostle baptized with waters from the

fountain all whom the presbyters presented as prepared for the rite. Vinitius impatiently thought that the night would never end. His aim was to follow Lygia as soon as possible and seize her either on the way or at her home.

At last some of the Christians began to leave. Then Chilo whispered, "Master, let us go and wait at the gate, for people look at us askance seeing that we have not removed our hoods."

This was true. While the Apostle was preaching, the congregation had cast aside their hoods for convenience of hearing. They alone had not followed the general example. Chilo's advice seemed sound. Standing at the gate they could see all who passed out. The huge form of Ursus would easily be recognizable.

"Our plan is to follow them," said Chilo. "We shall see whither they go. To-morrow, master, or rather to-day, thou wilt surround the house with thy slaves and capture her."

"No!" cried Vinitius.

"What then is thy will, master?"

"We will follow her to the house and seize her at once. Wilt thou undertake this, Croto?"

"Yea, master," replied Croto, "and thou mayest make me thy slave if I break not the back of that bull who watches over her."

But Chilo would fain have dissuaded them. He implored them by all the gods not to act so rashly. Croto had accompanied them only to assist in their defense if they were recognized. He had not been employed to capture the girl. To seize her when they were only two against a multitude was to risk almost certain death. Worse still, she might escape from them and hide elsewhere or flee from Rome. What could they do? Why not wait until they were certain of success? Why expose themselves to destruction and risk a failure of the enterprise?

Though it was with great effort that Vinitius had restrained himself in the cemetery from seizing Lygia then and there, he saw that the Greek was right. He might

have listened to his counsel but for Croto, whose one thought was of the promised reward.

"Master," he cried, "command silence to that old goat or let me crush his head with my fist. On a time in Buxentum, after a spectacle to which Lucius Saturninus had taken me, seven drunken gladiators fell upon me at a tavern. Not one of them escaped me with a whole rib. I do not advise the seizure of the girl here in the crowd, for they might pelt us with stones. Wait till she has reached her house. There I will seize her and bear her whithersoever thou wishest."

"By Hercules!" cried Vinitius, delighted with the advice, "so be it. To-morrow we may not find her at home. If we alarm them they may spirit her away."

Chilo groaned. "This Lygian is terribly strong," he urged.

"Thou wilt not be asked to hold his hands," retorted Croto.

There was still a long wait before them. Not until cock-crow did they catch sight of Ursus and Lygia coming through the gate. A number of people accompanied them. Among these, Chilo thought he recognized the great Apostle. Beside him walked another old man of much smaller stature, two elderly women and a boy who lighted the way with a lantern. A crowd of about two hundred followed. In this crowd mingled Vinitius, Chilo and Croto.

"Yea, master," said Chilo, "thy maiden is strongly guarded. 'Tis the great Apostle himself who walks before her. See how they kneel as he passes them."

In fact many did kneel. Vinitius, however, paid no attention to them. Never for a moment did he lose sight of Lygia. His one thought was that of her capture. His military experience had accustomed him to stratagem. He arranged the whole affair in his mind with military precision. He felt that his plan was an audacious one, but he knew that success often crowned audacity.

The way was long. At times his thoughts dwelt upon that strange creed which had opened a gulf between him

and Lygia. Now he understood the meaning of everything that had happened. He had penetration enough for that. He had never really known Lygia before. He had seen in her a maiden surpassing all others, a maiden who inflamed his passions, he knew now that her religion differed her from others. He recognized the vanity of his former hope that sentiment or passion, or wealth, or luxury, could tempt her. Last of all he understood what Petronius and he had never understood, that the new creed engrafted upon the soul something entirely foreign to the world in which he lived, and that even if Lygia loved him she would not for the sake of that love surrender an iota of her faith. If she looked forward to happiness, it was a happiness entirely different from that sought by himself, or Petronius, or Cæsar's court, or all Rome. There was no other woman of his acquaintance whom he could not make his mistress; this girl could only be his victim. At this thought rage seized him and a poignant pain because of the very uselessness of that rage. It might be possible to carry off Lygia; nay, he was assured that it was possible, but he was equally assured that in the face of her religion he himself was nothing, his courage was nothing, his power was nothing, all these things were of no avail. The Roman soldier and Tribune, who had believed in the might of sword and fist to conquer the world and dominate it forever, realized for the first time in his life that beyond that might there was a greater might. Puzzled he asked himself what it was.

He could give no clear answer. Confused pictures chased one another through his brain—the cemetery, the vast congregation, the figure of Lygia, listening with all her soul to the words of the old man as he told of the passion, death, and resurrection of the God-man, who had redeemed the world, and promised it everlasting happiness beyond the Styx.

His brain was in a whirl. But he was brought back to earth again by the laments of Chilo, bewailing his fate. He had been hired to find Lygia, he had found her at the peril of his life, he had pointed her out. What more

could he do? Could they expect him to carry her away, he, an old man who had lost two fingers, an old man devoted to philosophy, science, and virtue? Suppose so mighty a lord as Vinitius were to come to grief in the effort to capture the maiden! The gods are indeed expected to watch over their favorites, but does it not often appear that the gods give themselves up to dice-playing, forgetting what goes on in the world? We all know that Fortune is blindfolded. It is hard enough for her to see in the daylight, what must it be at night-time? Suppose anything were to happen. Suppose that Lygian bear were to hurl a millstone, a keg of wine, or, worse still, a keg of water, at the noble Vinitius, who could say whether blame instead of reward might not fall to the lot of the unhappy Chilo? A poor philosopher, he had attached himself to the noble Vinitius, as Aristotle to Alexander of Macedonia. If the noble Vinitius would give him merely the purse which he had thrust into his girdle before starting, that might be of some avail in an extremity, to summon aid or to bribe the Christians. Oh! why not listen to the advice of an old man who spoke from the fullness of wisdom and experience?

Vinitius at once pulled out the purse and flung it at Chilo.

"Take it and hold thy tongue."

The Greek, feeling its weight, grew more cheerful.

"My one hope," he said, "lies in the fact that Hercules and Theseus performed still more difficult tasks. And is not Croto, the friend of my bosom, a Hercules? As to thee, master, thou art more than a demigod—thou art a god. Surely thou wilt not forget in the future thy humble and faithful servant, whose needs must occasionally be provided for. When he is deep in his books, he forgets everything else. An acre or two of garden land, and a small house, with but the tiniest portico for shade in summer would well befit so princely a giver. From this sequestered retreat I will hail thy heroic deeds, and invoke the intercession of Jove, and if need be, raise so great a clamor that half Rome will rush to thy aid.

Verily, this is a rough and difficult road! The oil in the lantern is all consumed. If Croto, whose strength is only equalled by his nobility of character, would carry me to the gate in his arms, he would first be able to satisfy himself that he could carry the maiden easily, and, secondly, by imitating Aeneas, he would win over the favor of the honest gods and so assure the success of the enterprise.

"Rather would I carry a sheep dead for a month of the mange," was the gladiator's answer, "but hand over that purse given by the worthy Tribune, and I will carry thee to the gate."

"Mayest thou forever lose the great toe from thy foot!" replied the Greek. "Hast thou profited naught from the teachings of that good old man who spoke of poverty and charity as the greatest of virtues. Did he not expressly command thee to love me? Alas, I see that I can never make of thee even a poor Christian. Easier would it be for the sun to penetrate the walls of the Mamertine Prison than for the truth to penetrate that hippopotamus skull of thine."

"Fear not!" cried Croto, whose beast-like strength was conjoined with no element of human feeling, "I shall not be a Christian; I care not to lose my bread!"

"Yet but if thou knowest the merest rudiments of philosophy thou wouldst know that gold is vanity."

"Away with thy philosophy! I will butt my head into thy stomach, and thou wilt see who wilt come out the victor."

"An ox might have said the same thing to Aristotle."

The world was growing lighter. The gray of the morning defined the outlines of the walls. The trees that skirted the road, the buildings, and the gravestones scattered here and there emerged from the shadows. New signs of life appeared. Dealers in vegetables hurried their heavily laden asses and mules towards the gates, carts full of provisions creaked along the highway. A light mist lay upon the road and beyond it on both sides. This was a portent of fair weather. Through that mist the passers

loomed in the distance like phantoms. Vinitius had his eyes fixed upon the slender figure of Lygia, which seemed to grow more luminous as the light increased.

"Master," said Chilo, "far be it from me to foresee where thy bounty will cease. But now that I have been paid thou wilt not suspect me of speaking only for myself. Once more I advise thee to go home, to collect thy slaves and to bring a litter as soon as thou hast discerned the home of the divine Lygia. Hearken not to that mere elephant's trunk, Croto. He promises to carry off the maiden only to squeeze thy purse as though it were a bag of curds."

"I have a blow of the fist to be struck between the shoulders which means that thou shalt die!" cried Croto.

"I have a cask of Cephalonian wine, which means that I shall live!" retorted the Greek.

Vinitius made no answer. They had now neared the gate, where a strange scene greeted him. Two soldiers knelt as the Apostle passed, who laid his hands upon their helmets, and then made the sign of the cross over them. The patrician had not dreamed that there were Christians among the soldiers. Amazed, he thought that just as a great conflagration attacks house after house, so did that religion sweep within it new converts every day, from all classes of minds. Now he saw that if Lygia desired to escape from the city she would find guards to assist her. He thanked the gods that she had not essayed this.

As they reached vacant spaces outside the walls, the groups of Christians scattered. It was necessary, therefore, to follow Lygia from a greater distance, and with more care, lest suspicion be aroused. Chilo, complaining of bruises and pains in his legs, fell further and further to the rear. Vinitius was content to allow this, as he knew that the pusillanimous and incompetent Greek would not be needed. He would not even have denied him if he had expressed a wish to quit them. But the philosopher still followed them, urged on probably by curiosity. Oc-

casionally he approached them to repeat his former counsels. He informed them also that he would have taken the Apostle's companion for Glaucus, but that his diminutive stature had reassured him.

It took a long time to reach the Trans-Tiber. The sun had almost risen when at last the group around Lygia dispersed. The Apostle, with an old woman and a boy, went up the river, his companion with Ursus and Lygia, turned into a narrow quarter, and about a hundred yards further on, entered a house which contained two shops, one for the sale of olives, the other of poultry.

Chilo, lagging about fifty yards behind Vinitius and Croto, stopped, and crouching close to the wall, softly called them to turn back. They did so, wishing to consult as to their next movement.

"Chilo," said Vinitius, "go round and see if this house fronts on some other street."

Chilo forgot his bruises and pains, disappeared around the corner as nimbly as though the wings of Mercury were attached to his ankles. In a moment he returned.

"No," said he; "there is but one entrance. But I implore thee," he added, clasping his hands, "by Jupiter Apollo, Vesta, Cybele, Iris and Osiris, Mithra and Baal, and all the gods of the East and the West, to drop this plan. Hearken to me—"

He stopped short. He caught sight of the face of Vinitius, pale with agitation, and the wolfish glitter in his eye. One look was enough to convince him that nothing on earth would move him from his purpose. Croto drew air into his herculean breast, and swayed his formless head from side to side, as bears do in confinement. But not an iota of fear was visible in his face.

"I will enter first," he said.

"Thou wilt follow me," commanded Vinitius, imperiously.

Then both vanished through the dark entrance. Chilo found refuge behind the corner of the nearest alley, and awaited results.

CHAPTER XXII

Not till he had reached the hall did Vinitius understand the whole difficulty of the enterprise. The house was large, containing several stories. It was one of the thousands of buildings erected in Rome for renting to tenants. These houses, for the most part, were so hurriedly and poorly built that rarely a year passed without a number of them falling down upon the heads of their occupants. Veritable beehives they were, high and narrow, full of little rooms and dens overcrowded by the poor. In a city where many streets were without names, these houses had no numbers. The owners entrusted the collection of rents to slaves, who, not being obliged by the city authorities to report the names of the tenants, often did not know the names themselves. To find anybody by inquiry in such a house was often a difficult task, especially when there was no doorkeeper.

Vinitius and Croto came to a long passage like a corridor, walled in on four sides, forming a kind of common court for the entire building, with a fountain in the middle, the water of which sprayed into a stone basin embedded in the ground. At all the walls were stone or wooden stairways, leading inwardly to galleries that gave access to lodgings. On the ground floor were more lodgings, some provided with doors, others separated from the yard only by woolen curtains. These were for the most part torn or patched.

It was early dawn. There was no one in the yard. Evidently everybody was asleep in the house, save those who had returned from Ostranium.

"What shall we do, master?" asked Croto, halting.

"Let us wait here; somebody may appear," replied Vinitius. "It is best that we should not be seen in the yard."

None the less he thought that Chilo's advice was practical. Had he with him but a score or so of slaves, nothing would have been easier than to occupy the gate, which apparently was the only exit, and then search all the lodgings. It was necessary to find Lygia's abode at once, otherwise the Christians, who certainly were plentiful in this house, might warn her that she was being searched for. On this account it was dangerous to make inquiries of strangers. Vinitius was turning over in his mind whether it would not be better to return for his slaves, when from behind a curtain screening a remote lodging, emerged a man carrying a sieve in his hand, who approached the fountain.

The young Tribune at once recognized Ursus.

"'Tis the Lygian," whispered Vinitius.

"Shall I break his bones now?"

"Wait!"

Ursus had not seen them, for they stood in the shadow of the entrance. He quietly set to work washing the vegetables that filled the sieve. It was evident that he was getting ready a meal after the night spent in the cemetery. When he had finished his preliminaries he took the wet sieve and disappeared behind the curtain. Croto and Vinitius ran after him, expecting that they would gain immediate access to Lygia's lodgings. They marvelled greatly on finding that the curtain divided not lodgings from the courtyard, but another dark passage, at the end of which they beheld a small garden containing a few cypresses and myrtle bushes, and a small house attached to the back wall of another stone building. Both understood that this was a favorable circumstance. The tenants might all assemble in the courtyard, but the seclusion of the little house made their project easier. They would overcome Ursus quickly and would reach the street just as quickly with the captured Lygia. There their troubles would be over. Probably no one would molest them. If they were questioned they would say that a hostage of Caesar's had escaped. Vinitius would then declare himself to the guards and would call upon them for help.

Ursus was on the point of entering the little house, when the sound of footsteps attracted his attention. He halted, and seeing two men, put down the sieve and turned towards them.

"Whom seek ye?" he asked.

"Thee," replied Vinitius.

Turning to Croto he said in a low, hurried voice,

"Kill!"

Croto sprang upon Ursus like a tiger, and before the Lygian could recover himself or recognize his enemies, he had caught him in his arms of steel.

Vinitius was so certain of Croto's superhuman strength, that he did not wait to witness the issue of the combat. Passing the two, he sprang to the door of the little house, pushed it open, and found himself in a room lighted only by a fire burning in the hearth. A gleam from this fire fell full upon the face of Lygia. A second person sitting by the fire, was the old man who had accompanied the girl and Ursus on the road from Ostranium.

Vinitius rushed in so suddenly, that before Lygia could recognize him, he had seized her around the waist, and lifting her, had gained the door again. The old man attempted to bar the way, but, holding the girl with one arm, Vinitius pushed him aside with the other. The hood fell from his head. At sight of his familiar but now terrible features, the blood froze in Lygia's veins, and utterance died in her throat. She would have called for help, but could not. Vainly did she attempt to grasp the door frame and to resist. Her fingers slipped along the stone. She would have fainted were it not for a horrible sight that she was compelled to witness, when Vinitius had reached the garden.

Ursus was holding in his arms the limp form of a man, whose head was hanging down with blood flowing from his mouth. Seeing them the giant struck the head once more with his fist, and instantly sprang towards Vinitius like an infuriated animal.

"Death!" thought the young Tribune.

Then he heard, as in a dream, the cry of Lygia, "Thou

shalt not kill!" Then he felt that something like a thunderbolt relaxed the arms with which he embraced Lygia; then the earth spun round, and the light of day vanished from his eyes.

. . . . . .

Chilo, hiding around the corner, was waiting for what would happen. Curiosity and terror fought for the mastery within him. Should they succeed in kidnapping Lygia, he deemed that he would fare well at the hands of Vinitius. He had no further fear of Ursus, for he was confident that Croto would kill him. He calculated that in case a crowd should gather in the now empty streets, or if Christians or anybody else, should offer resistance, he would speak to them as one in authority and a representative of Caesar. If necessary he would summon the guards to help the young patrician against the mob, and thus win fresh favor. He thought that the plan of Vinitius was unwise; but when he considered Croto's remarkable strength he owned that it might succeed and thought that if any difficulty arose, the Tribune might carry the girl while Croto would clear the way. Time passed slowly, however, and the silence of the entrance where he watched affrighted him.

"If they do not find her hiding place, and make a noise, they will give her warning."

But this thought was not repugnant to him. He saw that in such a case he would again become necessary to Vinitius, and could squeeze out of him a number more of sesterces.

"Whatever they do," said he to himself, "it will enure to my benefit, though no one perceives it. Gods! O gods! gods!—permit me only—" He stopped suddenly. It seemed to him that some one was leaning forward from the entrance. Crouching still closer to the wall, he peered out, holding his breath. He had not been deceived. A head thrust half-way out of the entrance looked hastily around. A moment later it disappeared.

"That is Vinitius or Croto," thought Chilo, "but if

they have seized the girl, why does she not cry out, and why are they gazing out upon the street? They are sure to meet people anyway, for before they reach the Carinae there will be people stirring in the city. What is that! By the immortal gods!"

The remnant of his hair rose suddenly on his head.

In the doorway stood Ursus, the body of Croto hanging on his arm. Warily glancing around, the giant started to run with the body towards the river.

Chilo flattened himself against the wall like a piece of plaster. "I am gone if he sees me."

Ursus ran quickly past the corner and disappeared against the next house. Chilo, without more ado, his teeth chattering with fright, ran along the cross street with a swiftness that would have done credit to a youth.

"If when coming back he spies me from afar, he will catch me and kill me," said he to himself. "Save me, Zeus! save me, Apollo! save me, Hermes! save me, God of the Christians! I will leave Rome and return to Mesembria, but save me from the clutch of that demon!"

The Lygian, who had slain Croto, seemed to him a superhuman being. Even as he ran he wondered if he were some god who had assumed the appearance of a barbarian. At that moment he believed in all the gods of the world, and in all the myths, at which he usually mocked. It passed through his mind also, that it might have been the God of the Christians who had killed Croto, and his hair rose again at the thought that he was warring against such a power. Not until he had traversed a number of alleys, and seen some workmen approaching him did he recover. His breath failed him, so he sat down on the steps of a house and wiped his perspiring forehead with a corner of his mantle. "An old man like myself needs rest," said he.

The men turned into a side street. Again he was in solitude. The city still slept. In the mornings the stir began in the wealthier sections of the city, where the slaves of rich families were made to rise before daylight. In the sections inhabited by the freed population, sup-

ported in idleness at the expense of the state, the inhabitants rose late, especially in winter time. Chilo, after sitting for some time, began to get cold, so he got up, and after feeling for the purse that Vinitius had given him, he walked slowly towards the river.

"I may see Croto's body somewhere," said he to himself. "Gods! this Lygian, if he be a man, could earn millions of sesterces in one year. If he strangled Croto like a whelp, who could withstand him? He could get his weight in gold for each appearance in the arena. He guards that girl better than Cerberus does Hades. But may Hades swallow him! I want nothing to do with him. He is too muscular. But what shall I do now? A horrible thing has happened. If he has broken the bones of such a man as Croto, surely the soul of Vinitius is weeping over that cursed house, waiting for his burial. By Castor! He is a patrician, a friend of Caesar, a relative of Petronius, a man known throughout Rome, and a military Tribune. His death will not be passed by. Suppose I should go to the pretorian camp, or to the city guards?"

He stopped and debated with himself, then after a time he resumed:

"Woe is me! who led him to that house if not I? His freedmen and his slaves know that I came to him, and some know with what purpose. What will happen to me if they suspect that I purposely pointed out to him the house where he met his death? Although afterwards in court I could prove that I did not desire his death, they will say that I was the cause of it. Besides, he is a patrician, so in any case I will be punished. But if I steal away from Rome and go far away I should expose myself to still greater suspicion."

It was a bad case from any point of view. The only thing to be done was to choose the lesser evil. Rome was a big place, but Chilo felt that it might become too small for him. Another man might have gone straight to the prefect of the guards and informed him of what had happened. Suspicion might indeed fall on him, but he could

calmly assist the investigation. But Chilo's whole past was of such a character that a closer acquaintance with the prefect of the city, or with the prefect of the guard, would cause him serious trouble, and confirm also any suspicions that might come into the heads of the officers.

On the other hand, to fly would be to convince Petronius that Vinitius had been betrayed and murdered through conspiracy. Petronius was a powerful man who could enlist the police and the whole Empire, and who would undoubtedly endeavor to find the guilty ones even at the end of the earth. Still Chilo debated whether he should not go to Petronius and tell him the whole story. This might be the best plan to pursue. Petronius was an even-tempered man and Chilo could be certain at least that he would hear him out to the end. Petronius, who knew the whole affair, would be more likely to believe in Chilo's innocence than the prefects.

But before going to him it was necessary to know for a certainty what had befallen Vinitius, and Chilo did not know that. He had seen the Lygian stealing towards the river with Croto's body, but that was all. Vinitius might be killed, or he might only have been wounded and taken prisoner. Now the thought struck Chilo that the Christians would not dare to kill so powerful a man, an Augustale, and a high military official, for such a deed might cause a general persecution. It was more likely that they had forcibly detained him to give Lygia time to hide herself in some other place.

This thought filled Chilo with hope.

"If that Lygian dragon has not torn him to pieces at the first onset, he is still alive, and if he is alive, he himself will testify that I have not betrayed him: and then not only nothing menaces me, but—O Hermes! count on two heifers again—a new field opens before me. I can inform one of the freedmen where to look for his master. It is his business whether he goes to the prefect or not—the point is that I will not go. I may even count on a reward from Petronius. First I search for Lygia, now I shall search for Vinitius, then for Lygia again. But

first of all I must find out whether Vinitius is alive or dead."

Here it occurred to him that he could go at night to the miller, Demas, and inquire about Ursus. But he threw aside this idea, he preferred to have nothing to do with Ursus. It was more than probable that if Ursus had not killed Glaucus, he had been warned perhaps by some Christian elder to whom he had confessed his purpose, that it was an evil affair to which a traitor had persuaded him. Besides, the very thought of Ursus sent a shiver through Chilo's body. He thought that in the evening he would send Euritius to the house in which the affair had happened, and let him bring back the news. Meantime he needed refreshment, a bath, and rest. The sleepless night, the journey to Ostranium, the flight from the Trans-Tiber, had fatigued him beyond measure.

One thing gave him much comfort; he had two purses for himself; one which Vinitius had given to him at home, and another which he had flung to him on the way back from the cemetery. Because of this happy circumstance, and because of the excitement through which he had passed, he resolved to eat heartily and to drink better wine than usual.

When at length the hour arrived for opening the wine shops, he ate and drank so much that he forgot about the bath. He desired sleep above all things, so he returned with wavering steps to his abode in the Suburra where a female slave, bought with Vinitius's money, awaited him.

As soon as he had entered the bedroom, dark as a fox's hole, he threw himself upon the bed and immediately fell asleep. Not till evening did he awake, or rather he was then awakened by the slave woman calling him to get up, for some one was inquiring for him and wished to see him about an urgent matter.

The vigilant Chilo was awake in an instant. Hastily throwing on his mantle and hood, he commanded his slave to stand aside and peered out cautiously. The sight which greeted him almost paralyzed him. Before

the door of the sleeping room stood the gigantic form of Ursus.

He felt his feet and head grow cold as ice. His heart ceased to beat, and shivers passed up his spine. For some time he could not speak, but at length with chattering teeth he said or rather groaned:

"Syra—I am not at home—I know not that—good man—"

"I told him thou wert home and asleep, master," answered the girl, "but he bade me to awaken thee."

"Oh gods! I will command that thou—"

But Ursus, as if impatient of delay, approached the door of the bedroom and thrust his head inside.

"Chilo Chilonides!" he said.

"Peace be with thee! peace! peace!" replied Chilo. "Oh best of Christians! yes, I am Chilo, but there is some mistake—I know thee not!"

"Chilo Chilonides," repeated Ursus, "thy master, Vinitius, demands that thou go to him with me."

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

VINITIUS was awakened by a poignant pain. Where was he? What was happening? For a moment he could not tell. There was a roaring in his ears, a mist over his eyes. Gradually he came into full possession of his senses, and through that mist he saw three men bending over him. Two of them, he recognized. The first was Ursus. The second was the old man whom he had knocked down as he fled with Lygia. The third was a stranger. He had hold of Vinitius's left hand, and was feeling the arm from the elbow to the shoulder blade. This caused such exquisite agony that Vinitius, imagining it was some scheme of vengeance that was being wreaked upon him, cried through his set teeth: "Kill me!"

The men paid no attention to these words. They acted as though they had not heard them, or hearing, deemed them but the meaningless moans of a badly wounded man. Ursus, his face serious, yet stern in its strong barbaric lines, held a bundle of white linen rags torn into long strips. The old man was addressing the stranger.

"Glaucus," he said, "art thou certain that the wound in the head is not mortal?'

"I am certain, worthy Crispus," was the reply. "While serving as a slave in the galleys, and, later, while residing in Naples, I occupied my spare time in nursing the wounded. With my earnings I purchased my own freedom and that of my family. The wound in the head is a slight one. When this man" (he nodded at Ursus) "snatched the girl from the young man he knocked him against the wall. To save himself the youngster shielded his head with his arm, which he dislocated and broke."

"Thou hast had many of my brethren under thy care," replied Crispus, "and thou are renowned as a skillful physician. That is why I sent Ursus for thee."

"Ursus? Why, he is the man who on the way hither confessed that yesterday he was ready to kill me."

"Before he made that confession to thee, he had already said the same to me. I, who know thee and thy love for Christ, explained to him that not thou, but that stranger who sought to incite him to murder, is the traitor."

"'Twas an evil spirit which I took for a good one," replied Ursus, with a sigh.

"Tell me all about it some other time. Let us now care for the patient." With these words Glaucus proceeded to set the broken arm. Vinitius, notwithstanding the water which Crispus sprinkled over his face, fainted away. This was fortunate, as it saved him from feeling the setting of the bones, and the tightening of the bandages around the two splints between which Glaucus placed the arm so as to render it immovable.

After the operation was over, Vinitius revived. He woke to see Lygia.

She was standing by his bed. In one hand she held a bronze pail, wherein Glaucus from time to time dipped his sponge, wetting the head of the patient. Vinitius stared. He could not believe his eyes. Was this a gracious vision vouchsafed him by the fever? It was some time before he could whisper:

"Lygia!"

At the sound of his voice the pail trembled in her hand. She turned upon him eyes full of sorrow.

"Peace be with thee," she murmured, faintly.

She stood there with outstretched hands, her face beaming with pity. He stared at her as though he wished to fasten her image upon his retina where it might remain after his eyelids were closed. He stared at her face, paler and thinner now than ever before, at the dark tresses of her hair, at her cheap working girl's dress. He stared so fixedly that under the influence of his gaze her snowy forehead flushed a rosy red. His first thought was that he

would love her always, his next, that her pallor and her poverty were due to him—to him who had driven her from a home where she was surrounded by love and plenty, and forced her into the wretched hovel, and clad her with this threadbare dress of dark wool. Willingly would he have arrayed her in the costliest gold brocade and adorned her with the most precious jewels in the world! Wonder and alarm and pity overcame him. If he could have stirred he would have thrown himself at her feet.

"Lygia," he said, "thou didst not suffer me to be killed!"

In sweet, low tones she replied: "May God restore thee to health."

To Vinitius, mindful of all the harm which he had brought down upon her in the remote and more recent past, these words were as balm. He forgot for a moment that her lips could utter Christian teachings, he felt only that the speaker was the woman he loved and that her reply was fraught with a special tenderness, a superhuman goodness which stirred him to the depths of his being. Once more he grew weak. It was not pain now, but emotion that overcame him. A faintness, overwhelming but delicious, seized him. It seemed to him as if he were falling into a deep abyss, yet the fall was a delight, and he was happy. At that moment he felt as though face to face with a divinity.

Glaucus had now finished laving the wound in his head, and had placed upon it a healing salve. Ursus took the basin from the hands of Lygia, who, lifting a cup of wine and water from the table, placed it to the lips of the sufferer. Vinitius drank eagerly, and felt immediate relief. After the wounds and bruises had been dressed the pain almost ceased. Perfect consciousness returned to him.

"Give me more drink," he said.

Lygia retired with the empty cup to the next room. Crispus, after exchanging a few words with Glaucus, approached the bed.

"Vinitius," he said, "God did not allow thee to ac-

complish a great wrong. He preserved thy life in order that thou shouldst repent. He in whose sight man is but dust gave thee unarmed into our hands, but Christ in whom we believe has commanded us to love even our enemies. We dressed thy wounds, and as Lygia has said, we will pray God to restore thy health, but we cannot care for thee any further. Peace be with thee, therefore. But consider whether it be right to continue thy persecutions of Lygia, whom thou hast deprived of home and guardians, and of us who have returned to thee good for evil."

"Is it your intention to leave me?" asked Vinitius.

"It is our intention to leave this building where the city prefect can reach us. Thy comrade has been killed. Thou who art a man of influence among thine own people lie here wounded. 'Twas no fault of ours, but we might be made to answer for it before the law."

"Fear not," said Vinitius. "I will protect you from prosecution."

Crispus did not explain that their fear was not solely on account of the prefect and the police, but of Vinitius also, whom they could not trust, and from whose further pursuit they wished to protect Lygia.

"Master, thy right hand is well," he said. "Here are stylus and tablets. Write to thy servants that they come here with a litter and bear thee to thy home, where thou wilt have better accommodations than our poverty can afford. We are living here with a poor widow who will soon return with her son. The lad will carry thy letter. As to ourselves, we will seek another hiding place."

Vinitius paled. He saw that they wished to part him from Lygia. In losing her again he felt that he would lose her for life. He recognized that grave obstacles had intruded themselves between him and her, and that he must think up some scheme to gain possession of her. But for this he needed time. He perceived also that whatever he might tell these people, even if he swore that he would return Lygia to Pomponia Graecina, they would not believe him, and would be right in their unbelief.

Long before, in lieu of harassing Lygia, he might have gone to Pomponia and sworn to renounce all further pursuit. Then Pomponia might have found the girl and taken her back. No, he felt that no promises of this kind could impose upon them, nor could his solemn oath be taken, since he was no Christian, and could only swear in the name of the immortal gods, in whom he himself had scant belief, and whom they looked upon as evil spirits.

Fain would he have conciliated Lygia and her guardians in any possible way, but this required time. He felt the need of seeing her even for a few days. As a drowning man sees safety in every fragment of a plank or an oar, so it seemed to him that during these few days he might say some words which would bring her closer to him, that he might evolve some scheme, or that some lucky accident might occur. Collecting his thoughts, he said:

"Hearken to me, oh, Christians! Yesterday I was with ye in Ostranium. I listened to your teachings. Even if I had not heard them, your actions alone would have convinced me that ye are upright and inoffensive people. Bid the widow who dwells in this house to remain here. Do you also remain, and allow me to remain. Let this man" (he turned his eyes on Glaucus) "who is a physician, or at least understands the dressing of wounds, judge whether it would be safe to transfer me elsewhere to-night. I am sick. I have a broken arm which must remain immovable for at least a few days. Therefore, I say to you that I will not leave here save ye bear me away by force." And with that he stopped speaking, his bruised breast refusing him further utterance.

"No one, oh, master, will use force against thee. We alone will take ourselves from here to a place of safety."

The youth, unused to opposition, knitted his brows.

"Let me take breath," he cried.

In a moment he began to speak again. "Nobody will ask after Croto, whom Ursus strangled. He intended to go to-day to Beneventum, whither he was called by Va-

tinius. Everybody will think he is on his way. When we came with Croto to this house nobody saw us save one man, a Greek, who was with us in Ostranium. I will tell you where he resides. Bring him here. I will order him to keep silence, for he is in my pay. I will write home that I also have gone to Beneventum. If the Greek has already informed the prefect, I will say that it was I who killed Croto; for that he broke my arm. I swear by the ashes of my father and my mother that I will do this. Therefore, ye may remain here without danger. Not a hair on any head will be injured. Bring the Greek to me at once. His name is Chilo Chilonides."

"In that case," said Crispus, "Glaucus will remain with thee, oh, master, and will aid the widow in caring for thee."

Vinitius frowned more darkly.

"Hearken, old man, to what I say," he cried. "I owe thee gratitude. Thou seemest to be good and harmless. But thou dost not utter that which is in the bottom of thy heart. Thou fearest lest I call my slaves and take Lygia. Is it not so?"

"It is so," replied Crispus, gravely.

"Take heed, then. See that I speak with Chilo in your presence, and in your presence I will write home saying that I have gone. I will select no other messengers save you. Take heed thyself, and do not further vex me."

As he spoke, his face was distorted with anger. A little later he resumed, violently:

"Think ye I will deny that it is for her sake I wish to remain here? A fool could perceive this, even were I to deny it. But I will no longer attempt force where she is concerned. To thee I will say one thing more. If she will not remain here, with this well hand I will tear away the bandages from my arm. I will take neither food nor drink, and may my death rest upon the heads of thee and thy brothers. Why didst thou nurse me? Why didst thou not command my death?'

He was now pale with anger and weakness. Lygia in

the next room had overheard all. She was confident that Vinitius would keep his promises. His words alarmed her. Not for anything would she have wished his death. Wounded and unarmed, he had awakened her pity and not her fear. From the time of her escape she had lived among religious enthusiasts, whose only thoughts were of sacrifices, oblations and unlimited almsgiving. To such a degree was she imbued with the spirit of her surroundings that it took the place of her home, of her family, of her lost happiness, and transformed her into one of those Christian virgins whose influence was to change the erstwhile soul of the world.

Vinitius was too important a factor in her life, he had thrown himself too obtrusively in her way, to make it possible for her to forget him. For whole days she had thought of him. Often had she prayed God to send an opportunity when, following the dictates of her faith, she might return him good for evil and charity for persecution, might humble his pride and win him to Christ.

And now the opportunity had come. Her prayers had been answered. She approached Crispus, her face beaming as that of one inspired. When she spoke it was as though some other voice were finding utterance through her lips.

"Crispus," she said, "suffer him to remain with us, and we will remain with him until Christ has healed him."

To the aged presbyter, accustomed to see in all things the finger of God, Lygia's exaltation took on the aspect of a direct message from on high. He bent his head, and with awe in his heart answered, "Be it so."

On Vinitius, who had never taken his eyes from the virgin's face, this immediate obedience of Crispus produced a strange and profound impression. It seemed to him that Lygia was a sibyl or priestess among these Christians who rendered her honor and obedience. Almost against his will he surrendered himself to that honor. To the love that he felt was now added a kind of awe, before which Love itself seemed impertinence. He did not know how to accustom himself to the thought

that their relations were now changed. That now it was he that was at her mercy not she at his. Lying here sick and broken, he had ceased to be the aggressor and the conqueror, and was merely a helpless child under her guardianship. To his haughty and domineering nature such a relation with any other being would have been a humiliation. This time, however, not only did he not feel humiliated, but he was grateful to her as to a superior. These were new feelings which he could never before have dreamed of as a possibility, and which even then would have astonished him if he could have explained them to himself. But now he did not ask why this thing had happened. He accepted it as something absolutely natural. He simply felt happy at being allowed to remain where she was.

He wished to thank her with gratitude and some other feeling, so little known to him that he could not name it, for it was humility. But the excitement he had gone through had so exhausted him that he could not speak. He could only thank her with his eyes, wherein shone joy that he could remain with her, could look on her tomorrow and the next day, mayhap for a long time. There was only one fear to spoil his joy—the fear of losing what he had gained. So great was this fear that when Lygia once more approached him with a cup he had to suppress a wild craving to grasp her hand. He dared not do it; yet he was the same Vinitius who at Nero's banquet had forcibly kissed her lips, and after her escape had sworn that he would drag her by the hair to his bed, or order her to be flogged.

CHAPTER II

Nevertheless, he now began to dread lest some exterior agency might ruin his joy. Chilo might readily communicate the news of his disappearance to the prefect or to his own freedmen. This would mean the coming of a

watchman to the house in which he lay. For a moment, it is true, the temptation came to him that he might give an order to seize Lygia and lock her up in his house. But the next instant he felt that he could not do it. Arrogant, self-willed and dissolute as he was, merciless enough when need be, he yet was no Tigellinus, no Nero. Military life had imbued him with some feeling of justice, of good faith, and of conscience which made him recognize the dastardly nature of such a deed. In a moment of anger, indeed when in full possession of his strength, he might have done this. But at this moment and under these circumstances, his nerves were unstrung. He was sick at heart. He was moved with strange emotions. All that he cared for was that no one should stand between him and Lygia.

Astonished, he perceived that from the moment that Lygia had pleaded for him, neither she herself, nor Crispus, had sought any assurance from him, seemingly confident that some supernatural force would defend them in case of need.

Vinitius, who, since he had heard the sermon of the Apostle at Ostranium, had felt the distinction between the possible and the impossible fading away, was inclined to believe that this might be so. But recovering his wonted mood, he called to mind what he had said about the Greek and again told them to bring Chilo before him.

Crispus consented. It was decided to send Ursus. Vinitius, in the last days before his visit to Ostranium, had often sent his slaves to Chilo, without finding him. He now explained to the Lygian exactly where Chilo resided. Then, writing a few words on the tablet, he addressed himself to Crispus.

"I give you this tablet, because this man is suspicious and treacherous. Often when I have summoned him he has sent word to my messenger that he was away. This he always did when he had no good news for me and was afraid of my anger."

"Let me find him and I will bring him whether he be

willing or not," replied Ursus. Taking his cloak he hurried out.

It was no easy task to find any one in Rome, even with the completest directions. Ursus, however, was aided in such cases by the instincts of the semi-savage of the forests and his intimate acquaintance with the city. Hence he soon found himself in Chilo's dwelling. He failed to recognize him. Only once before, and then at night, had he seen him. Furthermore, the towering and self-possessed old man who had ordered him to murder Glaucus so little resembled the Greek who now bent himself almost double before him in abject fear, that no one could have imagined them the same person. Chilo, perceiving that Ursus took him for a stranger, was relieved. The sight of Vinitius's writing on the tablet quieted him still more. It never occurred to him to think that Vinitius would entrap him into an ambuscade. Nor did he imagine that the Christians could have killed Vinitius, inasmuch as they would not dare to lift their hands against so eminent a person.

"Ah, so Vinitius will protect me in case of need," he thought; "surely then he does not summon me for the purpose of giving me up to death."

Regaining courage, he asked: "Good friend, did not the noble Vinitius send a litter for me? My legs are swollen. It is impossible for me to walk so far."

"No," replied Ursus, "we will walk."

"Suppose I decline?"

"Do not. Thou must go."

"Be it so. But I go of my own free will. No one can compel me, for I am a freedman and a friend of the city prefect. As a philosopher I have means against the use of force. I know how to change men into trees and animals. But I will go, I will go. I will first don a warmer cloak and a hood so that the slaves in this quarter may not recognize me. If they did they would detain me at every step to kiss my hands."

Speaking thus, he put on another mantle, as well as an

ample Gallic hood in order that Ursus should not recognize him in a broader light.

"Whither wilt thou lead me?" he asked Ursus on the way.

"To the Trans-Tiber."

"I have not dwelt long in Rome, and I have never been in the Trans-Tiber, but doubtless in that quarter also there dwell men who love virtue."

Now the blunt and outspoken Ursus had already heard Vinitius say that the Greek had been with him in the Ostranium cemetery. Later he had seen the pair at the portal of the house where Lygia lived. So he halted for a moment and said:

"Tell no lie, old man. To-day thou wert with Vinitius at the Ostranium and at our portal."

"Ha!" said Chilo, "is your house in the Trans-Tiber? I have been but a short time in Rome and am not familiar with the names of the quarters. Thou sayest truth, my friend, I stood at thy portal to-day, and I strove to persuade Vinitius, in the name of virtue, not to enter. True, also, I was in Ostranium. And dost thou know why? Because for some time past I have been endeavoring to save Vinitius. I would that he could hear the oldest of the Apostles. May the light gain access to his soul and to thine. Certainly as a Christian thou must wish that truth should conquer falsehood."

"Yes," said Ursus, humbly.

Chilo had now entirely regained his courage.

"Vinitius is a powerful lord and a friend of Caesar," he said. "He often listens to the suggestions of evil spirits, but if a hair of his head were injured Caesar would revenge himself on all Christians."

"Nay, we are protected by a still greater power."

"True, true. But what do you intend to do with Vinitius?" asked Chilo, with renewed fear.

"I know not; Christ commands charity."

"Thou sayest well. Remember this always. Otherwise thou wilt be fried in hell like sausage in a frying pan."

Ursus uttered a sigh. Chilo said to himself that he could do anything he would with this man, terrible as he might be in a moment of passion.

Anxious to know how things had gone since the carrying off of Lygia, he asked with an assumption of sternness:

"What hast thou done with Croto? Speak, and tell no lie."

Once more Ursus sighed.

"Vinitius will tell you," he said.

"Which means that you stabbed him with a dagger or killed him with a club."

"I was unarmed," answered Ursus.

The Greek could not repress his wonder at the supernatural strength of the barbarian.

"May Pluto—I mean, may Christ forgive you."

For awhile they continued their journey in silence. Then Chilo said:

"I will not betray thee, but look out for the watchmen."

"I fear Christ, not watchmen."

"That is right. There is no greater crime than murder. I will pray for thee, but I know not that my prayer will help thee unless thou wilt vow that thou wilt not raise a finger against anybody."

"But I did not kill with premeditation," replied Ursus.

Chilo, who was determined to ensure his own safety, continued to instill into the mind of Ursus a horror of murder, and to persuade him to take the vow. He also questioned Ursus about Vinitius, but the Lygian answered him unwillingly, again asserting that he would hear all that was necessary from the lips of Vinitius himself. Thus talking, they traversed the long distance from the dwelling of the Greek to the Trans-Tiber, and reached the house. Chilo's heart throbbed uneasily. In his terror it appeared to him that Ursus gazed upon him with a look of longing ferocity.

"Small comfort it would be to me," he thought, "if he should kill me without premeditation. Would that paral-

ysis might strike him as well as all his fellow Lygians. Grant this, oh Zeus! if thou canst."

So thinking he drew his Gallic mantle more tightly around him, explaining that he was afraid of the cold. At length, after passing the portal and the first courtyard, they found themselves in a corridor leading to the garden. Chilo halted suddenly and said:

"Let me take breath, otherwise I could not speak with Vinitius to give him wholesome advice."

He stopped short. Though he repeated to himself that no danger menaced him, nevertheless the thought of facing those mysterious people whom he had seen in Ostranium, made his legs tremble somewhat.

From the inside, hymns came floating to his ears. "What is that?" he queried.

"Thou claimest to be a Christian; yet thou knowest not that we have a custom after each meal of singing a hymn of praise to the Saviour. Miriam and her son must have returned by this time. Mayhap the Apostle is with them, as he is a daily visitor to the widow and Crispus."

"Lead me to Vinitius."

"Vinitius is in the same room as the others, as it is the largest room. The rest are small dark chambers which we use only for sleeping. Come in and rest yourself."

They went in. The room was somewhat dark. It was a cloudy winter evening. The light of a few lamps struggled dimly through the gloom. Vinitius felt rather than saw that the hooded man was Chilo. The latter, seeing Vinitius stretched on the bed, went straight to him without looking at the others, as if convinced that with him alone was safety.

"Master, why didst thou not take my advice?" he exclaimed, clasping his hands together.

"Keep still," said Vinitius, "and listen."

He looked sharply into Chilo's eyes, speaking slowly but distinctly, as if he wished every word to be taken as an order to be forever engraved upon Chilo's memory:

"Croto assaulted me with intent to rob and murder,

Dost understand? So I had to slay him. These people dressed the wounds which I received in the fight."

Chilo perceived at once that if Vinitius spoke in this way it was by some previous arrangements with the Christians, and that he wished to be believed. He perceived this in Vinitius's very face, so without expressing either doubt or wonder, he lifted up his eyes and exclaimed:

"'Twas a thorough caitiff, oh, master! Remember, I warned thee not to put thy faith in him. All my precepts to him struck his head like peas against the wall. There is not torture enough in all Hades for him. If a man cannot be honest it is because he is a rascal. To whom is it more difficult than to a rascal to become honest? But to assault his benefactor, and so generous a master, ye gods!"

Here he recalled that on the way he had represented himself to Ursus as a Christian, and stopped short.

Vinitius resumed speaking. "Had it not been for the dagger I had with me, he would have killed me."

"Blessed be the moment when I advised you to take the dagger with you."

Vinitius, turning on the Greek a scrutinizing look, said: "What didst thou to-day?"

"Master, have I not told thee that I was offering up vows for thy health?"

"And nothing more?"

"I was just making ready to call upon thee when that good man brought me thy summons."

"Here is a tablet. Go with it to my house, find my freedman and give it to him at once. It is here written that I have gone to Beneventum. Thou wilt tell Demas from thyself that I went this morning in answer to an urgent call from Petronius."

He repeated emphatically: "I have gone to Beneventum. Dost thou comprehend?"

"You have gone, master! This morning I bade thee farewell at Porta Capena, and since thy departure such melancholy has overcome me, that if thy generosity do not

temper it, I will weep myself to death even as the unhappy wife of Zethus mourning for Itylus."*

Vinitius, despite his sickness and his knowledge of the craftiness of the Greek, could not refrain from smiling. But it pleased him that Chilo understood him at once.

"I will add an order," said he, "that thy tears be wiped away at once. Give me a lamp."

Chilo had now recovered his equanimity. He arose, and stepping to the hearth, took from the mantel one of the burning lamps. As he did this the hood slipped from his head. The light struck full in his face. Glaucus jumped from his bench. A few quick steps brought him face to face with the Greek.

"Dost thou not recognize me, Cephas?" he asked.

There was something so terrible in his voice that a shiver ran through all present. Chilo lifted the lamp and immediately let it drop. Then he bent himself in terrified supplication.

"No, I am not he, I am not he. Have pity!"

Glaucus glanced towards the people around the supper table and cried:

"Here is the man who betrayed and wrecked me and my family."

The story of Glaucus was known to all the Christians. Vinitius himself had heard it. But he had not guessed that Glaucus and the stranger were one. Owing to his continuous fainting spells during the dressing of his wounds he had not heard the man's name.

To Ursus the words of Glaucus came, in that moment, as lightning out of darkness. With one leap he was at his side. He seized him by the shoulders, and, shaking him, exclaimed:

"This is the man who persuaded me to murder Glaucus."

"Have mercy!" shrieked Chilo. "I will return thee everything," he moaned. "Oh, good master," he cried, turning to Vinitius, "save me! Oh, save me! I confided

* Aedon was changed into a nightingale.

in thee. Be my protector. I will take thy letter—O, master! master!"

Vinitius was least moved of all the spectators at this strange scene, first, because he knew all the hidden doings of the Greek, and second, because his heart had small room for pity or compassion.

"Bury him in the garden," he said coldly, "some other messenger will take the letter."

To Chilo these words seemed to be a final sentence. His bones were cracking in the terrible clutch of Ursus, pain filled his eyes with tears.

"For the sake of your God, do not kill me! Peace be with you! I am a Christian. If you do not believe me baptize me at once, twice more, ten times more. Glaucus, this is a terrible mistake. Let me explain. Make me a slave. Do not kill me. Mercy! mercy!"

His voice, stifled with agony, died away in a whimper. From behind the table rose the Apostle Peter. For a moment his white head trembled and drooped. His eyes closed. Then he opened them again, drew himself up and, amidst a hush of silence, said:

"The Saviour hath commanded, if thy brother sin against thee, chastise him; but if he is repentant, forgive him, and if he has offended seven times in the day against thee, and has turned to thee seven times, saying, 'Have mercy on me,' forgive him."

The silence grew deeper. Glaucus stood for a long time, with his face covered by his hands. At length he removed them.

"Cephas," he said, "may God forgive thee and thy trespasses against me, as I forgive them."

Ursus freed the Greek's arms and added:

"May the Saviour take mercy on me even as I take mercy upon thee."

Chilo fell to the floor, upon his hands and knees. Shaking his head like a beast caught in a trap, he gazed around in immediate anticipation of death. Even yet he could not believe his eyes and ears. He did not dare to

hope for mercy. Slowly he recovered himself, his blue lips still trembling from fright.

The Apostle said, "Go in peace."

Chilo rose. He could not speak. Automatically he sought the couch of Vinitius, as if looking to him for protection. Not yet could he understand that the man who profited by his services and was in a measure his accomplice, condemned him, while these very people whom he had injured forgave him. Recognition of this fact came later. At present he looked only astonishment and disbelief. He had heard the words of forgiveness, but his one aim was to rescue his head from these incomprehensible people, whose kindness affrighted him more than cruelty. It seemed to him that if he remained here any longer, something unexpected would again occur. Therefore, standing by Vinitius, he stammered out:

"Give me the letter." Taking the tablet which Vinitius handed him, he bowed low to the Christians, and then to the patient, and crouching along the wall, hurried out into the darkness of the garden. Fright raised the hair on his head, for he felt sure that Ursus would follow and kill him. Fain would he have put forth his utmost speed, but his legs failed him. The next moment he had lost complete control of them, as he caught sight of Ursus by his side.

Chilo fell with his face to the ground and cried out in agony:

"Ursus, for Jesus's sake!"

But Ursus said, "Be not afraid. The Apostle bade me lead you beyond the portal, so that you be not lost in the darkness. If you lack strength I will lead you to your house."

Chilo lifted his face.

"What sayest thou," he exclaimed, "thou wilt not slay me?"

"Nay, I will not kill thee. And if I clutched thee too fiercely and injured a bone of thy body, forgive me."

"Help me up," said the Greek. "What! you will not

kill me? Lead me to the street and I will make the rest of the journey alone."

Ursus lifted him as he might have lifted a feather and stood him on his feet. Then he led him through the dark alley to the second courtyard. Here was the exit to the street. In the corridor, Chilo repeated to himself, "I am lost!" Not until he had reached the street did he recover and say: "I can now go alone."

"Then peace be with thee."

"And with thee, and with thee! Suffer me to take breath."

After the departure of Ursus he drew a long breath. With his hands he felt all over his legs and hips, as though to convince himself that he was still alive and whole. Then he hurried forward. After a score of rapid steps he halted and said aloud: "Why did they not kill me?"

Notwithstanding his long dispute with Euritius about Christian teaching, notwithstanding his discussion with Ursus by the mill-pond, and notwithstanding all he had heard in Ostranium, he could imagine no answer to this question.

CHAPTER III

Vinitius also was at a loss for an explanation of what had happened. In the innermost depths of his soul he was as much astonished as Chilo. That these people should have treated him as they did, and in lieu of avenging his assault, should have carefully dressed his wounds, might have been ascribed partly to the doctrines they professed, more to Lygia, and not a little to his eminent position. But their behavior to Chilo was beyond his conception of the human possibilities of forgiveness.

Involuntarily the question forced itself upon him, "Why did they not kill the Greek?"

They could have done this without fear of punishment. Ursus could have interred the body in the garden, or

carried it at night to the Tiber, which, in those times of nocturnal homicides (often dictated by Caesar himself), cast up human corpses so frequently in the daytime, that few stopped to inquire whose they were or whence they came. Besides, in the opinion of Vinitius, the Christians not only could, but they ought to have killed Chilo. Yet compassion was not an entire stranger to the patrician world in which he belonged. The Athenians had raised an altar to compassion, and had long fought against the introduction of gladiatorial shows into Athens. In Rome the vanquished sometimes received mercy from the victor. Thus, Caractacus, a king of the Britons, taken captive by Claudius and richly provided for by him, was even then living in the city in liberty. But revenge for personal injuries seemed to Vinitius, as to all other Romans, just and right. To renounce it was opposed to all his feelings. True, he had heard in Ostranium that one ought to love one's enemies, but he held it to be a new theory without any application to real life. Even now the thought passed through his heart that possibly Chilo had not been killed because the day was a holiday, or fell under some phase of the moon when Christians were not allowed to kill. He had heard that among foreign nations certain days and periods were tabooed even for warfare. But why, then, was not the Greek surrendered to the hands of justice? Why, then, had the Apostle said that if thy brother had sinned against thee seven times, seven times shouldst thou forgive him? Why had Glaucus said to Chilo, "May God forgive thee, as I forgive thee?"

Chilo had inflicted upon Glaucus the most terrible injury that man can wreak on man. At the very thought of what he would do to any one who should kill Lygia, the heart of Vinitius seethed like a boiling cauldron. No tortures would be too terrible for such a wrong. And that man had forgiven! And Ursus, too, had forgiven, he who might kill any one he wished in Rome with entire impunity, for he could escape by simply killing the King of the Nemorian Grove and taking his place. How could the gladiator who held that dignity for the time

being—a dignity only held by killing the former king—stand up against the man whom Croto could not stand against? There was only one answer to all these questions. This was that they did not kill only because of a charity so stupendous that nothing like it dwelt elsewhere in the world, and because of a love for humanity so boundless that the believer forgot himself, his own injuries, his own happiness and sorrows, and lived only for others. What reward these people expected, Vinitius had heard in Ostranium, but it lay beyond his comprehension. Nevertheless, he felt that a life lived in this world with complete renunciation of all wealth and comforts would be a wretched one.

Therefore, in thinking about the Christians, pity and a shade of scorn mingled with his astonishment. In his eyes they were like sheep which sooner or later must be devoured by the wolf. His Roman nature forbade him to respect those who laid themselves open to be devoured. One point, however, startled him. It was that after the departure of Chilo, some great joy illuminated all faces. The Apostle approached Glaucus, and placing his hand on his head, said: "Christ hath conquered in thee."

Glaucus had lifted up a face as radiant as though overflowed by some great and unexpected happiness. Vinitius, who could only understand the joy of accomplished vengeance, stared at him with fever-brightened eyes, as one who gazed upon a lunatic. With some inward disturbance he saw Lygia press her queenly lips to the hands of this man who at first sight had the appearance of a slave. It seemed to him that the order of the world had been reversed. Then Ursus returned and related how he had led Chilo to the street, and craved his pardon for any injury he had inflicted upon his bones. Whereupon the Apostle blessed him also. Crispus declared that it was the day of a great victory. On hearing the word victory Vinitius was entirely at a loss.

When Lygia once more brought him a refreshing draught he held her hand for a second and asked: "And so thou forgivest me also?"

"We are Christians; we are not allowed to nurse anger in our hearts."

"Lygia," he said then, "whoever thy God may be, I will offer him a hecatomb, only because he is thine."

She replied, "Thou wilt honor him in thy heart when thou lovest him."

"Only because he is thine," repeated Vinitius. But his voice had grown faint. He dropped his eyes. Weakness once more overcame him.

Lygia left him, but shortly returned, and, standing by his couch bent over to see if he were sleeping. Vinitius felt that she was close to him. He opened his eyes and smiled. She placed her hand softly over his lids as if to induce him to sleep. A great calm settled down upon him. But now his condition changed. He felt worse. In fact, he was worse. With the coming of the night had come a violent fever. He could not fall asleep. His eyes followed Lygia wherever she went.

At times he fell into a half dream, wherein he saw and heard all that went on around him, but in which reality was strangely mingled with feverish visions. He thought that he saw Lygia a priestess, in a tower-shaped temple in an ancient and lovely cemetery. Without removing his eyes from her she appeared suddenly to be standing on the summit of the tower, a lyre in her hand, her entire form bathed in light. She resembled those priestesses who at night sang praise to the moon, and whom he had often seen in the Orient. Then he dreamed that by a great effort he climbed the spiral staircase to carry her off. Behind him crawled Chilo, his teeth chattering together with fright, and crying, "Master, do not do this. 'Tis a priestess who will be avenged by God." Vinitius did not know who this God was, nevertheless he knew that he was about to commit a sacrilege, and felt immeasurable terror. But when he reached the railing around the top of the tower, the Apostle with the silvery beard appeared suddenly by the side of the maiden, and said: "Raise not thy hand against her, for she belongs to me."

With these words the pair moved upwards as if as-

cending towards heaven on a pathway formed by the moon's beams. Then Vinitius, raising his hands, prayed them to take him with them.

At this point he awoke. With regained consciousness he stared about him. The fire in the hearth had gone down but still shed light enough for vision. The Christians all sat before the fire warming themselves, for the night was wintry and the room was cold. Vinitius noted their fog-like breath. In the midst of the group was the Apostle. Lygia sat at his knees on a low footstool, farther away sat Glaucus, Crispus, Miriam. On one side of the crescent so formed sat Ursus, on the other Nazarius, son of Miriam, a young lad with a beautiful face and long dark curls falling down his shoulders.

Lygia, her eyes uplifted to the Apostle, was listening intently. All eyes were turned to him. He was speaking in an undertone. Vinitius began to look upon him with a superstitious fear, hardly inferior to that which he had felt in his fevered vision. Was his dream at least half true, and was this wanderer from distant shores really to carry off his Lygia and lead her away through unknown paths?

He felt certain that he himself was the subject of the old man's talk. Possibly the latter was planning how to separate him from the girl. It seemed to him impossible that any other subject for conversation could come up. He bent all his energies to catch Peter's words.

But he found himself entirely mistaken. The Apostle was speaking once more of Christ.

"They live only in his name," Vinitius said to himself.

The old man was telling of the capture of Christ. "A detachment of soldiers and servants of the priests came to take him. When the Saviour asked whom they were seeking, they replied: 'Jesus of Nazareth,' but when Jesus said, 'I am he,' they fell on the ground and did not dare to raise their hands against him. Not until after the second question did they attempt to capture."

Here the Apostle paused, and stretching out his hands to the fire, continued: "The night was as cold as this.

But my blood boiled within me. I took my sword to defend Him, and I cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest. I would have defended him with more than my life, had he not said: 'Put up thy sword in the scabbard; shall I not drink the cup which the Father hath given me?' So they took and bound Him."

Having spoken thus, Peter raised his hand to his forehead and stopped short, as though striving to banish some of the recollections that crowded upon him, before proceeding further. Ursus, unable to bear any more, leaped up and stirred the fire with an iron, scattering a multitude of golden sparks around, until the flame shot up with new vigor. Whereupon he sat down and exclaimed: "Let what would have happened, I—"

He stopped short, for Lygia had placed her finger on her lips. He breathed loudly, however, and it was evident that his soul was in a turmoil. Although he was always ready to kiss the Apostle's feet, he could not approve that one act on his part. Had any one in *his* presence raised his hand against the Saviour, had *he* been with him that night, ah, how he would have laid about him among priests and servants and soldiers and officials. His eyes overflowed with tears at the very thought. He went through a frightful mental struggle. For, on the one hand, he thought how gladly not only would he have fought himself, but how he would have summoned to the aid of the Saviour his fellow Lygians, the very pick of them all. On the other hand, he reflected that this would have been disobedience to the Saviour himself—a disobedience which would have hindered the redemption of the world. Hence his tears.

Peter, withdrawing his hand from his forehead, continued the narrative.

But a feverish semi-somnolent state had now overcome Vinitius. What he had overheard mingled itself with what he had previously learned in Ostranium, of that day when Christ manifested himself on the shores of the sea of Galilee. He saw a vast surface of water whereon was a fisherman's boat. In the boat were Peter and Lygia.

He swam towards them with all his might, but the pain in his broken arm prevented his reaching them. A gale blew water into his eyes, he sank below the surface, and with a loud voice cried for help. Lygia knelt imploringly before the Apostle, who turned the boat and reached out an oar to him. Vinitius seized it. By its aid he succeeded in clambering into the boat and fell prone at the bottom.

After awhile, it seemed to him, he raised himself to his feet, and gazing back, he beheld a vast multitude swimming after the boat. The foaming waves broke over them. He could see the hands of some stretched out above the water. Peter saved one after the other of the drowning men by pulling them into the boat, which grew miraculously larger and larger. Soon great crowds filled it, as great as the crowds at Ostranium, and more and more were added to them. Vinitius wondered how they could find room, and was affrighted lest the boat should be swamped. But Lygia comforted him by showing him a light on the far-off shore towards which they were making. Again dreams were mixed with what he had heard at Ostranium, how Christ had manifested himself on the sea. In that far-off light he saw a form. Peter steered for the site on which it stood. As they drew nearer, the storm went down, the waters grew calmer, the light burned with a stronger blaze. The crowds began to sing a sweet hymn, the air was pervaded with the odor of nard, the waters took on the hue of a rainbow, as if lilies and roses were looking from the bottom of the sea. Finally, the boat's prow struck softly on the sand. Then Lygia gave him her hand, and said: "Come, I will lead thee," and she conducted him to the light.

Once more Vinitius awoke. His dreams slowly scattered. He slowly regained the full consciousness of reality. For a time it had seemed to him that he was still on the sea, surrounded by the multitude. Unwittingly he had looked around for Petronius and wondered why he was not there. The bright light of the fire-place, whence his former room-mates had now withdrawn, fully

awoke him. Branches of olive smouldered slowly on the rose-colored ashes, while splinters of vines evidently recently thrown upon the fire, shot up bright flames. In this light Vinitius saw Lygia sitting beside his couch.

The sight moved him to his soul's depths. He remembered that she had spent the previous night in Ostranium. Yet during the whole of the present day she had occupied herself in nursing him. Now that all had retired, she alone remained by his bedside. It was evident that she was tired. She sat motionless. Her eyes were closed. Vinitius knew not whether she slept or was buried in thought. He gazed at her profile, at her drooping eyelashes, at her hands, dropped listlessly on her knees. In his pagan brain the thought began to revolve, that besides the beauty of nudity, confident of itself and proud of its Greek and Roman perfection, there existed in the world another order of beauty, pure and undefiled, in which a soul had taken up its abode.

He could not bring himself to call this strange, new thing Christianity. Yet, looking at Lygia, he could not separate her from the creed which she professed. He now understood that if all the others had gone to sleep and she alone, whom he had wronged, had remained awake to keep watch over him, it was undoubtedly because that creed so commanded. Though this thought filled him with wonder, he felt it unbearable. He would have preferred that Lygia had done this thing from love for him, for his face, his eyes, for his statuesque form—in a word, for all those reasons which had often wound around his neck the snowy arms of Grecian and Roman beauties. And then he realized that were she like these other women, something would be wanting in her. He wondered at himself. What was happening to him? He recognized that strange, new feelings and tendencies were arising within himself.

She opened her eyes. Catching Vinitius's look, she approached.

"I am with thee," she said.

He replied, "I have seen thy soul in a dream."

CHAPTER IV

On the morrow he awoke weak, but with a cool brow. The fever had left him. It seemed to him that a whispered conversation had aroused him. When he opened his eyes, however, Lygia was not beside him. Ursus, bending over the fireplace, was raking the gray ashes away from the live coals beneath them. These he blew upon, not merely with his lips, but as if his lungs were a pair of bellows. Vinitius, remembering how yesterday this man had crushed Croto, gazed with the critical interest of a gladiatorial connoisseur at his Cyclopean back and his column-like thighs.

"Mercury be thanked that he did not break my neck!" reflected Vinitius. "By Pollux! if all other Lygians are like him, there is a hard task before the legions of the Danube."

He called aloud, "What ho, there, slave!"

Ursus withdrew his head from the fireplace. With a friendly smile he said:

"God give thee a good day, master, a happy day and good health, but I am a free man, not a slave."

Vinitius, anxious to question Ursus concerning Lygia's native place, was pleased by these words, for conversation with a free man, however simple, brought less humiliation to his Roman and patrician dignity than with a slave in whom neither law nor custom recognized a human being.

"Dost thou not belong to Aulus?" he asked.

"No, master, I serve Callina, as I served her mother, but by my own free will."

Once more he hid his head in the fireplace, to blow out the coal, on which he placed a bundle of wood. He withdrew it for a moment to say: "Among us there are no slaves."

"Where is Lygia?" asked Vinitius.

"She has just gone out, and I have to cook thy break-

fast, master. She kept awake all night to watch thee."

"Why didst thou not take her place?"

"Because she willed it so, and my duty is to obey."

Here his brow darkened. Next moment he added: "Had I not obeyed her thou hadst not now been alive, master."

"Art thou sorry that thou didst not kill me?"

"Nay, master. Christ did not command us to kill."

"And Atacinus and Croto?"

"I could not restrain myself," murmured Ursus. He gazed regretfully at his hands which had evidently remained Pagan though the soul had been baptized. He put a pot on the fireplace. Crouching down beside the fire he fixed a thoughtful regard on the flame.

"'Tis thy fault, master," he said, at length. "Why didst thou raise thy hand against her, the daughter of a king?"

Indignant pride was the first emotion aroused in Vinitius, that a common man and a barbarian dared not merely to address him so familiarly, but even to reprove him. To the strange and uncommon circumstances which had environed him since last night a new one had been added. But weak as he was and without his slaves around him, he restrained himself, the more that he wished to obtain further particulars of the past life of Lygia.

Recovering himself, he inquired about the war of the Lygians against Vannius and the Sueves. Ursus was more than willing to talk, but he could add little new to what Vinitius had already heard from Aulus Plautius. Ursus had not taken part in the battle, for he had conducted the hostages to the camp of Atelius Hister. He only knew that the Lygians had vanquished the Suevi and the Yazyges, but that their leader and king had fallen beneath the shafts of the Yazyges. News had quickly followed that the Semnones had set fire to the forests on their frontiers. They returned at once to avenge the injury. The hostages had been left with Atelius, who at first ordered that they should be treated with royal honor. Soon after Lygia's mother had died. The Roman leader

did not know what to do with the child. Ursus wished to return with it to the fatherland, but the road was infested with wild beasts and savage tribes. So when the news came that a Lygian embassy had waited on Pomponius, to propose that they should become allies with him against the Marcomani, Hister sent them to Pomponius.

From him, however, they learned that no embassy had arrived there, and thus they remained in the camp. Thither Pomponius took them to Rome, and after his triumph handed Lygia over to Pomponia Graecina.

Vinitius though few of these details were unknown to him, listened with pleasure, because his overweening patrician pride was elated that an eye-witness existed to the royal lineage of Lygia. As a king's daughter she could take a place in Caesar's court equal to that of the daughters of the first families, the more so that the people over whom her father ruled had never hitherto warred against Rome. It was barbarian, indeed, but it was formidable, for, according to the testimony of Atelius Hister himself, it possessed innumerable warriors. Ursus fully confirmed all this.

When questioned by Vinitius about the Lygians he replied:

"We are denizens of the forest, but we possess so much land that no one knows its confines, and we are large in numbers. There are towns in the forest built of wood. Here are many rare treasures. For what the Semnones, the Marcomani, the Vandals and the Quades despoil from the world we in our turn plunder from them. They dare not invade us. Only when the wind blows from their quarter they burn our forests. We are afraid neither of them nor of the Roman emperor."

"The gods gave to the Roman the sovereignty over the world," said Vinitius, with dignity.

"The gods are evil spirits," said Ursus, simply. "Where there are no Romans there is no sovereignty."

He stirred the fire and continued as if to himself:

"When Caesar took Callina to his court, and I thought evil might befall her, I wished to go far away in the

forests and bring with me a regiment of Lygians to help the king's daughter. Gladly would they have gone to the Danube, for they are good and brave, though Pagans. And I should have brought them good news. Even as it is, should Callina ever return to Pomponia Graecina, I will crave permission to go to them, for Christ was born in a far-off place, and they have never heard of Him. He knew better than I where it was right that He should be born. But if He had come into the world in our forests we would not have tortured and crucified him. We would have brought up the child, and cared for it, so that it had never wanted for game, nor mushrooms, nor skins of beaver, nor amber. Whatever we could have plundered from the Sueves or Marcomani we should have given to Him so that it could have plenty of comfort."

He placed on the fire the vessel containing broth for Vinitius. He paused in the flow of his talk. Evidently his mind was wandering in the Lygian forests. When the liquid began to simmer, he poured it into a shallow plate. Cooling it, he continued:

"Glaucus advises thee, master, that thou movest thy sound arm as little as possible, therefore Callina has asked me to wait on thee."

Lygia commanded this! Then no denial was possible. No thought of opposition to her will crossed Vinitius's brain. He obeyed as implicitly as if she had been the daughter of a Caesar, or a divinity.

Ursus, seating himself by his couch, dished up the broth in a small cup, which he presented to the patient's lips. He did this so carefully, with so kindly a smile in his blue eyes, that Vinitius could hardly accept the testimony of his own senses that this was the same Titan who last night after crushing Croto fell upon him like a tempest that would have torn him limb from limb but for Lygia's intercession. For the first time in his life, the young patrician began to ponder over the question as to what strange emotions and thoughts might be at work in the breast of a ruffian, a servant, and a barbarian.

Ursus as a nurse was as awkward as he was willing. The cup lost itself so completely among his herculean fingers that no place remained for the lips of Vinitius. After several vain efforts, the giant lost heart.

"Eh! It would be easier to lead a bison from out a tangled wilderness."

Vinitius was amused by the crestfallen look of the Lygian. He was no less interested in his conversation. In the circuses he had seen the terrible wild bull from the northern fastnesses, whom the bravest hunters pursued with fear, and whom only the elephant exceeded in strength and bulk.

"Hast thou ever tried to take such beasts by the horn?" he asked in amazement.

"Until twenty winters had passed over me I was afraid. But I then mustered up sufficient courage for the task."

Again he strove to feed Vinitius, more awkwardly than ever.

"I must seek the help of Miriam or Nazarius," he said.

Just then the pale face of Lygia was thrust out from behind the curtain.

"I will help you presently," she said. Next moment she had come out from the bedroom, where evidently she had been preparing for sleep, as she was clad only in a tight-fitting tunic called by the ancients a capitium. Her hair was unbound. Vinitius, whose heart throbbed more quickly at sight of her, remonstrated with her for not having yet sought her couch. But she replied gaily:

"I was just making ready for it. But first I will take the place of Ursus."

Taking the cup from Ursus, she seated herself at the edge of the couch and began to feed Vinitius. He experienced a mixture of humilation and joy. When she bent towards him, he felt the warmth of her body, and her long tresses rested on his breast. He paled with emotion. In the torment and turmoil of passion he felt that there was a head, dear and venerated beyond every-

thing, in comparison with which the whole world was as nothing. Once it had been mere passion which she had excited, now he felt that he loved her with all his heart. Once, like all people of his time, he was a blind and utter egotist both in life and in feeling, who cared only for himself; now he cared only for her.

Soon he declined any more food. Though he found boundless delight in her presence and in gazing at her, he said:

"Enough! Go to rest, Oh thou, my divinity!"

"Do not call me that. I ought not to listen," said Lygia.

Nevertheless, she smiled. She insisted that she had lost all desire for sleep, that she felt no fatigue, and that she would not retire to rest before the coming of Glaucus. Her words were music in his ears, his heart overflowed with still greater emotion, still greater ecstasy, still greater thankfulness, and he despaired of manifesting that thankfulness.

"Lygia," he said, after a short pause, "hitherto I have known thee not. But now I know that I would have gained thee by wrong means. So now I tell thee, go back to Pomponia Graecina, and be assured that henceforward no one will raise a hand against thee."

Her face fell. "It would give me great happiness if I could so much as catch a glimpse of her from afar. But I cannot go back to her."

"Why?" marvelled Vinitius.

"We Christians know, through Actea, what is happening on the Palatine. Hast thou not heard that Caesar, soon after my escape, and before his departure to Naples, summoned Aulus and Pomponia, and suspecting that they had assisted me, menaced them with his wrath? Happily, Aulus was able to reply:

" 'Thou knowest, Lord, that a lie has never passed my lips. Therefore now I swear to thee that we did not assist her to escape and that we know no more than thou what has become of her!' Caesar believed, and soon forgot. But by the advice of the elders I have never commu-

nicated with my mother, nor told her where I was, so that she always could boldly swear complete ignorance of my whereabouts. Thou mayst not understand, Vinitius, that we are not allowed to lie, even were our life at stake. Such is the teaching to which we conform our hearts. So I have not seen Pomponia since I left her abode. From time to time far-off rumors reached her ears assuring her that I was safe—"

Here a great longing overcame her. Her eyes filled with tears. She soon recovered herself, and said,

"I know that Pomponia is longing for me. But we have consolations unknown to others."

"Yes," answered Vinitius, "your consolation is Christ. But that is something I cannot understand."

"Look on us. We have no partings, no sorrows, no sufferings, or if they do come they are changed into joys. Death itself, which for you is the end of life, for us is only its commencement, a change from a state of minor to greater happiness, of minor calm to a higher, which shall endure for eternity. Think of a faith which commands us to love even our enemies, forbids lies, cleanses our souls from evil, and promises illimitable happiness after death."

"I heard all this in Ostranium. I have seen how you behaved towards me and Chilo, and when I think of all this, it seems a dream. I would fain disbelieve my ears and my eyes. But now answer another question:

"Art thou happy?"

"Yes," replied Lygia, "confessing Christ, I cannot be unhappy."

Vinitius gazed at her as if that which she spoke were altogether beyond human understanding.

"And wouldst thou not go back to Pomponia?"

"I would, with all my heart. I shall do so if such be the will of God."

"Then I say to thee, go back. In the name of my lares I swear that I will never raise my hand against thee."

Lygia pondered for a moment and then replied:

"No, I cannot expose my dear ones to peril. Caesar

does not love the family of Plautius. If I go back—you know the slaves scatter news throughout Rome—the fact would soon be rumored within the city. Nero undoubtedly would learn it from his slaves. He would punish Aulus and Pomponia. He would tear me away from them once more."

"Yea," said Vinitius, knitting his brows, "that is possible. He would do this if only to show that his will must be fulfilled. True, he only forgot thee and he would only remember thee, for that it was I, not he, that was offended. But perchance if he took thee away from Aulus he would bestow thee on me. Then I would return thee to Pomponia."

Sorrowfully she asked, "Vinitius, would you see me again on the Palatine?"

He ground his teeth together, and replied, "No. Thou art right. I spoke as a fool! No!"

It seemed to him that a bottomless abyss opened out before him. He was a patrician, a military tribune, a mighty man, but above all the power and the authority of the world to which he belonged stood a madman whose evil passions and evil will were beyond human ken. Not to take him into account, not to dread him, was possible only to people like the Christians, for whom this world with its separations, sufferings, and death itself, were as nothing. All others must tremble before him. The terrors of the times in which they were living presented themselves to Vinitius in all their monstrosity. Therefore he could not return Lygia to the Auli, fearful that the monster would remember her, and pour his wrath upon her. For the same reason, should he wed her, he would imperil her, himself, and the Auli. A moment of irritation would suffice to destroy all. For the first time in his life, Vinitius felt that the whole world needed a change, a regeneration, or life itself would become impossible. And further he felt this, which a moment before had been dark to him, that in such times the Christian only could be happy.

But, above all, remorse fell upon him as he recognized

that it was he himself who had so tangled up his own life and Lygia's, that no disentanglement seemed possible. Under the influence of this remorse he began to speak:

"Knowest thou that thou art happier than I? In poverty, in this one room, in the midst of base-born people, thou hast thy creed and thy Christ. I have only thee. And when I lost thee, I was like an outcast who has no roof above him, nor bread to eat. Thou art for me dearer than all the world. I sought thee, for that I could not live without thee. I cared neither for banquets nor for sleep. Save for the hope of finding thee I should have thrown myself on my sword. But I am afraid of death, for, dead, I could not see thee. I say but the frankest truth when I say that I cannot live without thee. Hitherto, I have lived only in the hope of finding and seeing thee. Rememberest thou our discourses at the Auli? Once thou didst draw upon the sand a fish. I knew not what it meant. Rememberest thou how we played ball? Even then I loved thee more than life. Even then thou hadst begun to perceive that I loved thee. And Aulus came, scaring us with talk of the Libitina, and broke up our discourse. When we took leave Pomponia told Petronius that God is one, almighty and all merciful, but it did not come into our minds to conceive that your God is Christ. Let Him return thee to me and I will love Him, although he seems to be a God of slaves, aliens and outcasts. Thou sittest by me, and thinkest only of Him. Think also of me, or I shall hate Him. To me thou alone art a divinity. Blessed be thy father and thy mother, blessed be the land which brought thee forth. Would that I could cast my arms around thy feet and pray to thee, shower honors upon thee, cover thee with offerings, humble myself before thee, oh, thou thrice divine! Thou knowest not, nor canst thou know, how much I love thee!"

He passed his hand over his pale forehead, and half-closed his eyes. His nature knew neither let nor hindrance in anger or in love. He spoke with wild passion,

as a man who, losing self-mastery, places no check to his words or his emotions. He spoke from the deeps of his soul, frankly and openly from his heart. It was evident that the pain, ecstasy, passion and adoration gathered in his breast were now let loose in an irresistible torrent of words. To Lygia these words seemed sacrilegious.

Nevertheless, her heart throbbed as though it would rend the tunic that invested her bosom. She could not help feeling pity for him, and for his sufferings. She was moved by the adoration which he poured out before her. She felt that she was loved and deified beyond measure, felt that this imperious and terrible man now belonged to her, soul and body, like a slave. This recognition of his submission and her own power filled her with happiness. Her memories revived in all their original force. Again he was the same Vinitius—splendid and beautiful as a Pagan god—who in the house of the Auli had spoken to her of love, and awakened her yet childish heart as from a dream, the same whose kisses she still felt on her lips, the same from whom Ursus had torn her away on the Palatine, as though he were tearing her away from the flames. But now, with mingled pain and ecstasy on his eagle face, with pale forehead and imploring eyes—wounded and crushed by love, full of adoration and of humility, he came closer to that ideal which she would have him realize, that ideal which she could love with her whole heart, and therefore he was now dearer to her than ever.

Then she realized that an hour might come when her love for him might carry her off her feet like a whirlwind, and she, too, felt as Vinitius had just felt—that she stood on the edge of a precipice. Was it for this that she had left the Auli? For this that she had saved herself by flight? For this that she had so long lain hidden in the poorer quarters of the city? Who was this Vinitius? An Augustale, a soldier, one of Nero's courtiers. He had taken part in Caesar's mad debauches, as was proved by that banquet which Lygia could never

forget. He had gone to the temples with the others and made offerings to depraved gods, in whom, mayhap, he had little faith, though he gave them official honors.

He had pursued her in order to make her his slave and his mistress. He had cast her into the midst of that terrible world of luxury, debauchery and depravity, that called aloud for the wrath and vengeance of God. True, he seemed changed, yet, but a moment ago, he had told her that if she thought more of Christ than of him, he would hate Christ. To Lygia it seemed that the mere thought of any other love than the love of Christ was in itself a sin against Him, and against His teachings. When, therefore, she saw that at the bottom of her soul other feelings and desires could be awakened, fear seized her as to her own future and her own heart.

At this moment of mental disturbance Glaucus entered. He had come to dress the wounds of the patient and to see how he was progressing. For a moment anger and impatience flashed in the eyes of Vinitius. The interruption made him wroth. When Glaucus questioned him, he answered almost scornfully. He calmed himself almost instantly. But if Lygia had preserved any faint illusion that what he had heard in Ostranium would soften his unbending nature, that illusion must at once have been dispelled. There was a change only towards her. Behind that single feeling his heart retained all the old fierceness and egoism, Roman and wolfish, incapable not only of realizing the sweetness of Christianity, but even of common gratitude.

She left the room, full of inner sorrow and inquietude. Hitherto in her prayers she had offered to Christ a calm heart, a heart as truly pure as a tear. Now the calm was disturbed. Within the petals of the flower a poisonous worm had intruded itself, and commenced its ravages. Sleep itself, notwithstanding two wakeful nights, brought her no peace of mind. She dreamed that at Ostranium, Nero, leading a troop of Augustales, bacchantes, corybantes, and gladiators, was crushing throngs of Christians under the wheels of his rose-covered chariot, and that

Vinitius, grasping her in his arms, pulled her into the chariot, and tightening his embrace about her, whispered:

"Come with us."

CHAPTER V

From that moment, Lygia appeared more rarely in the common room, and still more rarely approached the couch of Vinitius. But calm did not return to her. She saw the patient's imploring eyes following her every moment, knew that he accepted every word of hers as a favor, felt he dared not complain, through fear that she would shun him, and that she alone was joy and health to him. Her heart would overflow with compassion. But she saw that the more she turned away from him, the more she pitied him, and the tenderer were her feelings towards him. Peace forsook her. At times she strove to persuade herself that, in very truth, it was her duty to be with him constantly, first, because God taught that good should be returned for evil, and, second, because by her conversation she could draw him towards the true religion. But conscience stepped in to accuse her of paltering with herself, of being influenced only by his charm and by her love for him. Thus she lived in a constant turmoil, which intensified day by day. At times it seemed to her as though she were caught in the meshes of a net, and that every effort she made to escape only entangled her the more. She fain had to confess to herself that every day his face grew more necessary to her, his voice dearer, and that she needed all her strength to battle with the growing desire to sit by his couch. When she approached him, and his eyes brightened, joy danced in her heart. One day she observed traces of tears on his lashes. For the first time in her life there came a wild desire to wipe them away with kisses. Frightened at the very thought, full of contempt with herself, she wept all through that night.

For himself he was as patient as though he had sworn himself to patience. When at times his eyes flashed with impatience, self-will and anger, he repressed those feelings at once, and looked anxiously at her as if craving her pardon. This disarmed her the more. Never before had she had the feeling of being so much beloved. At thought of it she felt at once guilty and happy. Vinitius also was immensely changed. He showed less pride in his discussions with Glaucus. Often the thought came to him that this poor slave physician and the old barbarian Miriam, who surrounded him with care, and Crispus, whom he saw constantly immersed in prayer, were human beings.

These thoughts amazed him, nevertheless they visited him. In time he came to love Ursus, and conversed with him all day long because it gave him an opportunity to talk about Lygia. The giant, for his part, was inexhaustible in tales. While rendering the meanest services to him, Crispus, he began now to show him a sort of attachment. Though Lygia seemed to Vinitius a being belonging to another species, higher a hundredfold than those who surrounded her, none the less he began to have a fellow feeling with poor and simple folk, something he had never experienced before in his life. He even discovered in them traits of character which he had never noticed before.

Nazarius was the only one he could not endure. He felt that the youth dared to love Lygia. For a time he restrained his feelings. But once when Nazarius brought the maiden a pair of quails—purchased in the market with his own earnings—then the descendant of the Quirites asserted himself in Vinitius—the Quirites in whose sight the alien wanderer from strange shores was lower than the meanest vermin. Hearing Lygia's thanks, he turned frightfully pale, and when Nazarius went out to get water for the quails, he cried:

"Lygia, canst thou bear that he should give you presents? Dost thou not know that his people are called by the Greeks Jewish dogs?"

"I know not how they are called by the Greeks," replied she; "but I know that Nazarius is a Christian and a brother."

Astonishment and regret were in her eyes as she spoke. She had grown unused to such outbursts. He set his teeth to keep himself from telling her that he would fain order such a brother to be flogged to death, or would send him to labor with chained feet in his Sicilian vineyards. But he restrained himself, beat back his wrath, and finally said:

"Lygia, forgive me. For me thou art the daughter of kings, the adopted child of Plautius." He had so fully conquered himself when Nazarius reappeared in the room that he promised him when he returned to his villa, he would present him with a pair of peacocks, or of flamingoes, of which his gardens were full.

Lygia knew how dearly such self-conquest was purchased. But the more often he achieved it, the more her heart yearned towards him. His merit, in the case of Nazarius was, however, smaller than she supposed. Vinitius might be momentarily angry with him, but not permanently jealous. The son of Miriam, in his eyes, was a mere dog. Further, he was still a mere child who, if he loved Lygia, loved her without knowing what love meant. Harder battles must the young Tribune fight with himself to submit even in silence to the honor with which these people surrounded the name of Christ and his creed. Towards that creed he had taken up a strong attitude. As the creed in which Lygia believed, he was ready to recognize it. The nearer he approached to convalescence the more acutely he recalled the series of events which had flowed from that night at Ostranium, and the whole train of ideas which had since followed one another in his brain, the more he marvelled at the superhuman power of this religion which regenerated the soul of man from its foundations.

He perceived that there was something extraordinary in it, something heretofore unknown on earth, and he felt that if it could conquer the world and engraft into it

its own love and charity, an epoch would arise resembling that in which not Jupiter but Saturn had reigned.

He dared not doubt the supernatural parentage of Christ, his resurrection, nor the other miracles. The eye-witnesses who related them were too trustworthy, and had too firm an aversion for lies, to make it possible for him to believe that these things had never happened. Roman scepticism, which rejected the gods, accepted miracles.

Vinitius, therefore, found himself in the presence of a strange and insoluble problem. This religion seemed to him opposed to all existing order, utterly impracticable, and mad beyond any madness he had ever heard of. In his opinion, man in Rome and all over the world might be bad, but the extant order was good. If the Caesar of the day were honest, if the Senate of the day were composed not of depraved debauchees, but of men like Thasea, what more could be desired? Nay, Roman peace and the Roman rule were good; social inequality was right and just. To Vinitius's mind this new creed must prove subversive of all order, and all rule, must abolish all inequality. What would then befall the supremacy of Rome? Could Romans cease to govern? Could they recognize a herd of conquered nations as their equals? This was beyond the reasoning powers of a born patrician. Furthermore, this religion was personally repugnant to all his convictions, his customs, his character, and his ideas of life. He could not imagine himself existing if he accepted it. He feared and admired it, but acceptance was abhorrent to his nature. At the end of all the ends, he understood that this was the one thing which divided him from Lygia. When he thought of this he hated Christianity with all the energies of his being.

None the less, he could not fail to perceive that it had clothed Lygia with that exceptional, inexplicable beauty which had nurtured in his heart not only love, but homage, not only desire, but adoration, and had made Lygia herself dearer to him than any other being in the world. Then the desire to love Christ arose afresh. He saw clearly

that he must either love or hate, no middle ground was possible. Two currents drove him from opposite sides, he wavered in his thoughts and feelings, he knew not what to choose, he bowed his head and paid silent homage to that unknown God who was Lygia's God.

Lygia perceived what was going on within him; how he strove to humble himself, yet how his whole nature rejected the creed of Christ. On the one hand she was mortally grieved, on the other this unacknowledged respect which he felt for Christ inclined her heart to him with irresistible force. She recalled Pomponia Graecina and Aulus. For Pomponia it was a source of constant sorrow and never drying tears that beyond the grave she would not find Aulus. Lygia now grew into a completer understanding of this bitterness, this pain. She, too, had found a being who was dear to her, and eternal separation menaced them both.

It is true that at times she deceived herself into the belief that he might accept the teachings of Christ. But this illusion could not last. Too well did she know and understand him. Vinitius a Christian! Even in her inexperienced head the two conceptions could not blend. If the thoughtful, solid Aulus had not become a Christian under the influence of the wise and perfect Pomponia, how could Vinitius become one? There was no answer to this, save one—that for him there was no hope and no salvation.

She drew back with terror at the perception that the sentence of destruction which hung over him, in lieu of alienating him from her, rendered him, through very compassion, the dearer. At times she longed to speak to him frankly of his dark future. And once, as she sat beside him, she dared to tell him that there was no life outside of Christianity. He had now grown stronger. He lifted himself up with his sound arm, and suddenly laid his head in her lap, saying: "Thou art life!" Breath failed her at that moment, consciousness left her, a shiver of delight ran through her from head to foot. Taking his forehead between her hands, she strove to lift him,

but meanwhile bent so that her lips touched his hair. For a moment they weltered in the intoxication of the moment, then awoke to struggle against themselves and against love which urged them together.

Lygia rose at last and ran away. There was fire in her veins, and a giddiness in her head. But this was only the one drop that overflowed the cup filled already to the brim. Vinitius did not divine the price which he would have to pay for this moment of happiness. But Lygia saw that she needed saving from herself. She spent a sleepless night, in tears and prayers, feeling that she had no right to pray and that she would not be heard. Next morning she rose early, and summoning Crispus to the vine-covered arbor, there opened out her heart to him, praying him to let her leave Miriam's house, since she had lost confidence in herself, and found it impossible to conquer her love for Vinitius.

Crispus, aged, severe, ever immersed in religious ecstasy, assented to her desire for flight, but could find no words of forgiveness for a love which seemed sinful in his eyes. His heart filled with wrath and horror at the very thought that Lygia, whom he had watched over since the moment of her escape, whom he had loved, whom he had confirmed in the faith, and on whom he had looked as a white lily growing in the soil of the Christian creed, undefiled by any earthly breath, could have found a place in her heart for any but a heavenly love.

He had thought that in the whole world there did not exist a heart more purely and sincerely devoted to the glory of Christ. It was his desire to offer her to the Redeemer as a pearl, a jewel, rounded and perfected by his own hands. Hence this disappointment filled him with amazement and bitterness.

"Go, and implore God to pardon thy guilt," he said gloomily. "Flee ere yet the evil spirit who hath tempted thee bring thee down to utter ruin, ere yet thou renouncest the Saviour. God died on the cross for thee, with his own blood to redeem thy soul, but thou hast elected to love him who plotted to make thee his concubine. God

miraculously saved thee from his hands, and now thou openest thy heart from impure desire and beginnest to love the son of darkness. Who is he? A friend and servant of Antichrist, a participant in his debauchery and crimes. Whither will he lead thee, save to the abyss, to that Sodom in which he himself abides, but which God himself will annihiliate with the flames of His wrath? I say to thee, it were better that thou hadst died, that the walls of this dwelling had fallen upon thy head before this man crept into thy heart and contaminated it with the poison of his depravity."

He grew more and more excited. For Lygia's love filled him not only with wrath, but with contempt and loathing for human nature in general and for female nature in particular. Even Christian teaching could not save woman from Eve's weakness. It meant nothing to him that the maiden was still pure, that she wished to flee from temptation, that she confessed her love with remorse and shame. Crispus had wished to make an angel of her, to lift her to heights where no love existed save that of Christ. And lo! she had fallen in love with an Augustale. The very thought filled his heart with horror, intensified by disappointment and disillusion. No, she was beyond pardon. Words of contumely burned his lips like live coals, he sought to stifle them, but he shook his withered hands over the affrighted maiden. Lygia acknowledged her guilt, but not to that degree. She had imagined that her flight from Miriam's dwelling was a victory over temptation and a minimizing of her guilt. Crispus ground her into the dust, showed her a baseness in her soul which she had not hitherto suspected. She had even hoped that the old presbyter, who from the time of her escape from the Palatine, had taken the place of a father to her, might show her some compassion, console her, encourage her and strengthen her.

"I would fain offer up to God my disappointment and my pain, but thou hast cheated the Saviour himself, for

thou hast descended into a slough whose exhalations have poisoned thy soul. Thou mightest have offered it up to Christ as a precious vessel, saying: 'Fill it oh, Lord! with grace,' but thou hast preferred to offer it to the servant of the fiend. May God forgive thee, and show thee mercy! As to me, until thou cast out the serpent, I who deemed thee a chosen—"

He stopped short, realizing that they were not alone. Through the withered vines and the evergreen ivy, he saw two men. One was the Apostle Peter. The other he failed to recognize, for a mantle of coarse woven stuff, known as cilicium, hid a portion of his face; for a moment Crispus thought this was Chilo.

At the sound of Crispus' voice they approached the summer house, and entering, sat upon the stone bench. Then Peter's companion uncovered his thin face. The sides of his head were covered with curly hair, which grew thinner at the top, his eyelids were red, his nose crooked. In his homely yet inspired countenance Crispus recognized the features of Paul of Tarsus.

Lygia, throwing herself on her knees, despairingly embraced the feet of Peter and hiding her weary little head in the folds of his cloak, remained there in silence.

Peter said "Peace be with your souls."

And seeing the child at his feet he inquired what had happened. Then Crispus told of Lygia's confession of her sinful love, of her intended flight from Miriam's abode—and his sorrow that the soul which he had wished to offer to Christ as pure as a tear had been contaminated by earthly feelings for a participant in all those crimes in which the heathen world was sunk, and which called for the avenging wrath of God.

While he spoke, Lygia clung the more closely to the Apostle's feet, as if seeking a refuge there, and to supplicate for mercy.

The Apostle listened till the end. Then, bending down and placing his emaciated hands on her head, he turned his eyes upon the aged presbyter, and said:

"Crispus, hast thou not heard that our beloved Master was present at the wedding in Cana, where he blessed the love between woman and man?"

Crispus's hands fell. He stared with amazement at the speaker, powerless to utter a word. After a moment of silence Peter continued:

"Crispus, thinkest thou that Christ, who suffered Mary Magdalene to lie at his feet and forgave the adulteress, would turn from this child, who is as pure as a lily of the field?"

Lygia, sobbing, nestled closer to Peter's feet, understanding that she had not sought a refuge in vain. The Apostle, lifting up her tear-stained face, said:

"Until the eyes of him thou lovest are opened to the truth, shun him, lest he induce thee to sin, but pray for him and know that there is no guilt in thy love. Nay, since thou wishest to flee temptation, this will be accounted a merit to thee. Grieve not, weep not. I say to thee that the grace of the Saviour hath not left thee, and thy prayers will be heard, and that after sorrow will come days of joy."

With these words he laid his hands on her head. Lifting up his eyes he blessed her. From his face shone a supernatural charity.

Crispus, repentant, now sought humbly to justify himself.

"I have sinned against charity," he said, "but I thought that the admission of an earthly love in her heart was a denial of Christ."

"Thrice I denied him," interrupted Peter. "Yet he forgave me and commanded me to feed his sheep."

"And because Vinitius is an Augustale—" continued Crispus.

"Christ hath softened stonier hearts than his," urged Peter.

Then Paul of Tarsus, who had hitherto kept silent, put his finger to his breast as pointing to himself, and said:

"I am he that persecuted and harried to death the serv-

ants of Christ. I am he who at the stoning of Stephen kept guard over the garments of the stoners. I am he who would have rooted out the truth in all parts of the inhabited earth, yet none the less the Lord foreordained me to preach it all over the earth. I have preached it in Judea, in Greece, on the islands and in this godless metropolis, where on my first visit I was cast into prison. And now, when Peter, my superior, hath summoned me, I will enter this dwelling to bow this proud head before the feet of Christ, and sow the seed within that stony soil which the Lord will fertilize so that it may yield an abundant harvest."

He raised himself to his full height. To Crispus this little hunchback seemed at that moment what he was in reality, a giant who was to shake the world to its centre, and win over the nations and the countries.

CHAPTER VI

Petronius to Vinitius:

Have mercy, oh, best beloved! Do not in thy letters pattern after the Lacedemonians or Julius Caesar! Of course, couldst thou, like him, write "I came, I saw, I conquered," I might understand a laconism of this sort. But thy letter means only this, "I came, I saw, I fled." But such an outcome to any affair of thine would not consort with thy nature. Therefore, as thou art wounded, and as strange things have happened to thee, I seek a fuller explanation. Scarce could I believe my eyes when I read that the Lygian had strangled Croto as easily as a Scotch dog would kill a wolf in the ravines of Ireland. That man is worth his weight in gold. If he wills, he may easily become a favorite with Caesar. When I return to the city I shall seek a closer acquaintance with him, and shall order him to be cast in bronze. Bronzeheard will burst with curiosity when I tell him the figure has been cast from nature. Really athletic

bodies are becoming rare in Italy and Greece, to say nothing of the Orient. The Germans, though of large stature, have muscles covered with fat, and are big rather than strong. Ask the Lygian if he be an exception, or if there are other men like him in his own country. If thou or I were ever officially entrusted with the organization of the public games, 'twould be a good thing to know where to seek for the best bodies.

But praise be to the gods, both of the east and of the west, that thou hast escaped alive from such hands. Of course, thou didst escape because thou art a patrician and a man of consular dignity, nevertheless, all that has happened fills me with the greatest surprise—that cemetery where thou foundest thyself among the Christians, they themselves, their behavior toward thee, and later the escape of Lygia; finally, that peculiar melancholy and unrest which pervaded thy short letter. Explain thyself fully, for there are many things which I cannot understand. Thou wishest the candid truth. I will add, therefore, that I can understand neither the Christians, nor thyself, nor Lygia. Marvel not that I, who find interest in few things on earth save myself, question thee so eagerly. I am the cause of all that has happened, so it is in some sort of way my affair. Write at once, for I know not with a certainty when we shall meet again. Bronzebeard's plans are as uncertain as autumn breezes. He is now in Benevent. He announces that he will go to Greece and not to Rome. Tigellinus, however, advises him to return for a brief period, as the people, yearning for his presence (read "for games and bread"), may haply find relief in rebellion. So I know not what may happen. Should we decide on Achaea, we may then want to see Egypt. I should urge thee as strongly as possible to come here, for I see that in thy present mood the journey hither and our recreations would benefit thee, but thou run'st the risk of not finding us. Consider, therefore, whether it would not be better for thee to seek rest on thy Sicilian estates than to remain in Rome. Write me the fullest details about thyself.

Farewell! I send no wishes save for thy health, because, by Pollux! I know not what to wish thee.

On receipt of this letter Vinitius felt at first no desire to answer it. An answer seemed useless. It would benefit no one, it would explain nothing. Discouragement and a sense of the utter futility of human life weighed him down. In any case Petronius would be utterly incapable of understanding him. A great gulf seemed to have opened between them. He could not adjust his own mind to his present mood. After his return from the Trans-Tiber to his beautiful "island" in Carinus, he was still weak and exhausted. For the first few days he found some enjoyment in mere rest amid the comfort and plenty that surrounded him. But this enjoyment was short-lived. Again he felt the emptiness of his life. All which had formerly interested him had either ceased to exist for him or had shrunk to infinitesimal proportions. He felt that all the soul-ties which had bound him to life had been cut, and that no new ones were possible. At the thought of going to Beneventum and then to Achaia, to immerse himself in that life of luxury and mad excess, a sense of emptiness overcame him.

"Wherefore should I do this? What shall I gain?" These were the questions that suggested themselves. And for the first time in his life the thought of the conversation of Petronius, his very wit, his brilliancy, his exquisite precision of thought and phrase, wearied him.

But solitude also worried him. All his friends were with Nero in Beneventum. He was condemned to loneliness at home, with a head full of thoughts and his heart full of emotions which he could neither analyze nor explain. There were times when he longed for some one to whom he might pour out all these thoughts and sensations, in the hope that he might be able to grasp them, to co-ordinate them, and to make them yield up their meaning. Under this hope, after some days of hesitation, he decided to answer Petronius, and though uncertain

whether another letter would come in return, he put his into the following words:

It is thy wish that I should answer thee more fully. So be it. But as to whether I can do this clearly I know not, for there are many snarls which I may find it impossible to disentangle. I have told thee of my stay among the Christians, of their treatment, of their enemies, among whom myself and Chilo might be rightly reckoned, finally, of the kindness with which they nursed me and of the disappearance of Lygia. No, dear friend, I was spared, not because I am a man of consular dignity. Such considerations have no weight with them. They forgave even Chilo, whom I had counselled them to bury in the garden. These are people whose like the world has never seen. Their creed is one whose like the world has never heard. I can say nothing more. But he who measures them with our measures will fall into error. Why, I tell thee, that had I been lying with a broken arm in my own home, nursed by my own people, or even by my own family, I might certainly have enjoyed greater comfort, but not half the care I received from them.

Know this also, that Lygia is such as they. Were she my sister or my wife, she could not have nursed me with greater tenderness. More than one joy filled my heart, for I thought love, and love alone, could inspire such tenderness. More than once I have read it in her face, and then, wilt thou believe me? among these plain people, in that poverty-stricken chamber—kitchen at once and dining-room—I felt more happiness than I had ever known.

No! Her feeling toward me is not of indifference. To this day I cannot think of it, and yet that same Lygia escaped secretly from Miriam's house on my account. I sit all day with my head buried in my hands, pondering why she did this. Have I told you that I myself offered to return her to the Auli? She answered that this was now impossible, as the Auli had gone to Sicily, and as the news of her return, carried from house to house by

slaves, would finally reach the Palatine, so that Caesar might demand her again from the Auli. But she well knew that I would make no further attempts on her, that I had abandoned all thought of force, that, unable to cease from loving her, unable also to live without her, I would willingly lead her to my house through a garlanded door, and seat her on a sacred skin at my hearth. And still she disappeared. Wherefore? No further danger menaced her. If she loved me not, she could reject me. Only the previous day I had met an extraordinary man, one Paul of Tarsus, who spoke to me of Christ and his creed, and spake with such forcefulness that it seemed to me that every word would unwittingly reduce to ashes the very bases of our world. The same man visited me after her flight, and said to me, "When God opens thine eyes to the light and removes the scales from them, as he removed them from mine, then thou wilt see that what she did was right, and then perchance thou wilt find her again."

And I am puzzling over those words as though I had heard them from the lips of the Pythoness at Delphi. Sometimes a faint comprehension visits me. These people, though loving humanity, hate our life, our gods, and our crimes. So she fled from me as a man belonging to this world, and one with whom she could at best but share a life that was criminal in the eyes of Christians. Thou wilt say that as she might reject me, she had no need for flight. But suppose she loves me? In that case she sought to flee from love. At the very thought of this, the wish fills me to send my slaves into every alley in Rome, crying in every house, "Lygia, come back!"

But, again, I fail to understand why she did this. I would not have forbidden her to worship Christ. Nay, I myself would have erected an altar to Him in the great hall. One more God—what harm could he do me? Why might I not believe in Him, I who have scant faith in old gods? I am certain that the Christians never lie, and they say that he rose from the dead. No *man* could do this. Paul of Tarsus, who is a Roman citizen, but

who as a Jew is conversant with the ancient Hebrew scriptures, has declared to me that the advent of Christ was foretold for thousands of years by the prophets. All these are uncommon things, but does not the uncommon environ us on all sides? The fame of Apollonius of Tyana is not yet dead. What Paul affirms, that there is but one God, and not a crowd of them, seems rational to me. Seneca probably holds the same opinion. Many others held it before him. Christ was. He allowed himself to be crucified for the redemption of the world. He rose again from the dead. All this is certain. I see no reason, therefore, why I should stubbornly insist on a contrary opinion, why I should not erect an altar to Him, when I am quite ready to erect one, for example, to Serapis. Nor would it be difficult for me to renounce all the other gods, for no rational intellect now accepts them. But all this, it seems, does not suffice the Christians. It is not enough to render homage to Christ, one must live in accordance with His teachings. And so one stands as on the shore of a sea which one is ordered to walk on afoot.

Should I promise to do so, they themselves would feel the promise to be a mere empty sound upon my lips. Paul openly acknowledged this. Thou knowest I love Lygia, that there is naught I would deny her. But even at her bidding I could not lift Soracte or Vesuvius upon my shoulders, nor hold Lake Thrasymene in my palm, nor change my eyes from black to blue, like those of the Lygians. At her behest I might be willing, but these things are beyond my powers. I am no philosopher, and I am no fool, either, though I may appear so to thee, but I know this, that where Christian teaching begins, Rome's dominion ends, Rome ends, the old life ends, the distinction between vanquished and victor, between the mighty and the poor, between master and slave ends, government ends, Caesar, law and the order of the world end. And in lieu of all this comes Christ, with a charity never before extant, and a kindliness opposed to all human and all Roman instincts.

True, I care more for Lygia than for all Rome, and all its dominions. Let the whole world fall so long as I possess her in my own home! But this is another matter. For the Christians a mere verbal consent will not suffice, one must feel that their creed is right, one must banish all things else from one's soul. And, the gods be my witnesses! this I mean is impossible. Dost thou comprehend what I mean? There is something in my nature which revolts from this creed. Though my lips praised it, though I conformed my life to its precepts, my reason and my soul would tell me that I did so for love's sake, for Lygia's sake, and were it not for her, nothing in the world would be more abhorrent to me. Strange to say, Paul of Tarsus understands this. And Peter understands this—Peter, who despite his simplicity and his lowly origin, is the greatest among them—Peter who was the disciple of Christ. Knowest thou what they are doing? Lo! they are praying for me, they are imploring for me the gift of something they call grace, yet nothing came from it at all, so far as I am concerned, save a strange unrest and a wilder longing for Lygia.

I told thee she fled secretly. But she left behind her a cross which she had made for me out of two bits of boxwood. On awaking I found it by my bed. I now keep it in my sanctuary, and I cannot tell what strange feelings of awe and reverence come over me when I approach it. I love it because her hands bound it. I hate it because it divides us. At times it seems to me as if there were some sorcery at the bottom of this whole affair, and that this Peter, though he styles himself a simple fisherman, is mightier than Apollonius and all his predecessors, and that it was he who cast a spell upon all of us—upon Lygia, Pomponia, and myself.

Thou hast noticed in my previous letters signs of disquietude and melancholy. Melancholy there must be because I have lost her again, and disquietude because a great change has come over me. I tell thee frankly that nothing can be more repugnant to my nature than

this creed, yet from the time that I first encountered it, I have failed to recognize my old self.

Is this sorcery or is it love? Circe transformed human bodies by a touch. By a touch my soul has been transformed. Only Lygia could do this, or, rather, Lygia, acting through the creed that she professes. When I returned home from the Christians no one expected me. It was thought that I was in Beneventum, and would be away for a while. Disorder reigned. I found the slaves drunk at a banquet which they had spread in my dining-room. Death was sooner expected than I, and would have affrighted them less. Thou knowest with how strong a hand I rule my house. All threw themselves on their knees. Some fainted from fright. Canst thou guess what I did? My first thought was to call for rods and hot irons. Immediately shame seized me. Canst thou believe it? I absolutely felt pity for those wretches. Among them are old slaves, whom my grandfather, M. Vinitius, brought from the banks of the Rhine in the days of Augustus. I locked myself up alone in the library, and still stranger thoughts visited me, namely, that after all I had heard and seen among the Christians it was not meet for me to act as formerly I had acted toward my slaves, that slaves also are human beings.

For several days they moved around in mortal fear, believing that I had suspended punishment only in order to devise some still more ingeniously cruel one. But I did not punish them. I did not, because I could not.

On the third day I summoned them to my presence.

"I forgive you," I said. "Strive ye now with loyal service to make amends for your offense."

With streaming eyes, they fell upon their knees. Moaning they stretched out their hands. They called me Master and Father. And I—I say this with shame—I was equally moved. At that moment it seemed as if I saw the sweet face of Lygia. Her eyes were moist with tears, thanking me for that deed. And beshrew me if I did not feel mine eyes moisten in turn. Canst thou guess what I am about to

confess to thee? That I am lost without her, that all is ill with me, that I am in simple fact unhappy, and that my sorrow is greater than thou canst conceive. As to my slaves, one thing struck me. The forgiveness they had received did not make them insolent, nor weaken discipline among them. On the contrary, fear has never aroused them to such willing service as gratitude. They do not merely serve now, they seem to vie with one another in the effort to divine my very wishes. I mention this for the reason that on the day previous to my departure from the Christians I had said to Paul that society would fall apart as a result of his teachings, like a cask without hoops. Paul returned: "Love is a stronger hoop than fear." And now I see that in some cases he may be right. I have verified it in the case of certain clients who flocked to greet me on my return. You know I have never been niggardly with my clients. But my father on principle acted arrogantly toward them and taught me the same behavior. But now taking note of their threadbare cloaks and hungry faces, I had a feeling for them akin to pity. I ordered food to be brought them. I conversed familiarly with them. I asked them after their wives and children. I saw tears spring to their eyes. And again I felt that Lygia saw all this, that it gave her pleasure, that she praised it. Am I losing my mind? Or is love bewildering me? I know not. I only know I have a constant feeling that she is gazing on me from afar, and I am afraid to do anything that might pain or offend her.

Yes, Caius, my soul is changed. Sometimes I am glad of it. Sometimes I torment myself with the fear that I am losing my old-time manliness, my old-time energy, and that perchance I am already unfit, not only for council, for the judgment seat, and for the banqueting hall, but even for the battlefield. Doubtless here is some strange sorcery. So greatly am I changed that I even own to thee what passed through my mind as I lay sick; that if Lygia were like to Nigidia, Poppaea, Crispinilla or to others of our divorced women, were she similarly

vile, merciless and light-minded, I could not love her as I do. But as I love her for the sake of that which divides us, thou wilt divine what chaos has arisen in my soul, what darkness environs me, how hidden is the path before me, how uncertain my future. If my life be compared to a spring, unrest, instead of water, flows in that spring. I live only in the hope of seeing her. Sometimes I think this sight must be vouchsafed me. But what will happen during the next year or two I know not, nor can I guess. I will not leave Rome. I could not abide the society of the Augustales. Besides the only comfort in my melancholy and my unrest is the thought that I am near Lygia and that through Glaucus, who promised to visit me, or through Paul of Tarsus, I may occasionally gain some news of her. Nay, I would not leave Rome even were ye to offer me the governorship of Egypt. Know also that I ordered a sculptor to carve a stone monument for Gulo, whom I slew in my wrath. Too late came the thought that he had borne me in his arms, and had been the first to teach me how to put the arrow to the bow. I know not why the memory of him arose in me, a memory resembling reproach and remorse. If thou marvellest at what I write, I reply to thee that I marvel no less, but I write the candid truth. Farewell.

CHAPTER VII

No reply came to this letter. Petronius did not write, evidently expecting that Nero at any moment might command a return to Rome. In fact the rumor of a contemplated return spread throughout the metropolis, awakening a lively joy in the hearts of the mob, eager for games and the distribution of corn and olive-oil, great stores of which had accumulated in Ostia. Helius, Nero's freedman, finally announced the return to the Senate. But Nero, having embarked with his court at

the promontory of Misenum, returned slowly, landing at every city along the coasts to rest or to exhibit himself in the theatres. In Minturnae, where he sang in public, he spent over ten days. He even thought of returning to Naples, there to enjoy the spring which had come earlier and warmer than usual. During all this time, Vinitius remained shut up in his home, thinking of Lygia, and of all of the new things which had entered his soul, and brought into it hitherto unknown sensations and ideas. Glaucus called upon him from time to time. His visits filled Vinitius with inward joy, for he could speak with the physician of Lygia. Glaucus, it is true, knew not her hiding place, but he assured Vinitius that the elders surrounded her with protecting care. Once, moved by the melancholy of the young patrician, he told how the Apostle Paul had rebuked Crispus for reproaching Lygia with her earthly love. Vinitius, hearing this, paled with emotion. More than once it had seemed to him that Lygia was not indifferent to him, but quite as often he fell into doubt and uncertainty. Now, for the first time, he heard, from strange lips, from the lips of a Christian, the confirmation of his hopes. In the first moment of gratitude he would have run to Peter. Learning, however, that he was not in the city, but was preaching in the country, he implored Glaucus to bring him back, promising to make liberal donations to the poor of the community. It seemed to him, also, that if Lygia loved, all obstacles were removed, as he was ready at any moment to do homage to Christ. But though Glaucus strongly urged him to receive baptism, he would not assure him that thereby he would win Lygia at once, and told him that he must desire baptism for its own sake, and for the sake of Christ, and not for alien objects.

"And one needs also a Christian soul," he said.

And Vinitius, though he grew wroth at every obstacle, had now begun to understand that Glaucus as a Christian said only what he ought to say. He did not yet fully realize that one of the most radical changes in his

own nature was that previously he had measured men and things only through his own egoism. Nevertheless he was now gradually accustoming himself to the thought that the eyes of others might see differently, that the hearts of others might feel differently, that personal rights did not always mean personal gain.

The wish often seized him to see Paul of Tarsus, whose words interested and moved him. He conjured up arguments against his creed, he strove against him in thought, nevertheless he would fain see him. But Paul had gone to Aricium. As the visits of Glaucus grew rarer, Vinitius found himself in utter solitude. Again he began to traverse the alleys near Suburra and the narrow streets of the Trans-Tiber, in the hope of catching even a far-off glimpse of Lygia. When this hope was disappointed, weariness and impatience overpowered him. At length the time came when his old nature reasserted itself. It was like the onslaught of a wave at high tide on the shore whence it had retired. He said to himself that he had made a fool of himself to no purpose, that he had filled his mind with things which brought only sorrow in their train, that he ought to make life yield him all it could. He resolved to forget Lygia, or at least to seek joy and delight from all other sources. He felt that this trial was the last. So he threw himself into the turmoil of life with all the blind passion of his peculiar nature. Life itself seemed to invite him.

Rome, half dead and deserted during the winter months, had begun to revive with the hope of Caesar's speedy return. Preparations were going on for his solemn reception. Spring had come. The snows on the crests of the Alban Hills had melted away under the breath of African winds. Violets covered the lawns in the gardens. The Forum and the Field of Mars swarmed with people basking in the growing heat of the sun. On the Appian Way, the drive outside the city, a stream of chariots, richly caparisoned and adorned, passed to and fro. The usual excursions to the Alban Hill had begun. Young women, under the pretext of worshipping

Juno in Lanuvium, or Diana in Aricium, stole away from home in search of new impressions, of society reunions, and of pleasures, without the city walls.

Here one day Vinitius, among the splendid chariots that crowded the way, caught sight of one more magnificent than all, the car of Chrysothemis, Petronius's mistress. Two Molossian dogs preceded it. A crowd of young men and aged Senators, detained by their duties in the city, surrounded it. Chrysothemis, driving four Corsican ponies, scattered smiles around her and gaily flecked her golden whip. Perceiving Vinitius she reined up her steeds and made him mount beside her. She drove him to a banquet which lasted all night. Vinitius drank so deeply that he knew nothing when he was borne home. But he could remember that when Chrysothemis mentioned the name of Lygia, he was indignant and in his drunken wrath emptied a vessel of Falernian wine upon her head. Recalling this in his sober state, his anger returned.

Next day Chrysothemis, evidently forgetting the insult, called at his house, and once more drove him along the Appian Way. She supped with him that night, and confessed that she had wearied not only of Petronius, but of his lyrist, and that her heart was now free. All that week they appeared together. But the connection did not seem likely to last. After the incident of the Falernian wine Lygia's name was never recalled. Nevertheless, Vinitius could not banish the thought of her. He still retained the feeling that her eyes were ever gazing upon him, and that feeling made his heart sink. Discontented with himself, he could not free himself from the consciousness that he was paining Lygia, nor from the remorse with which this consciousness afflicted him. After the first scene of jealousy raised by Chrysothemis on account of two Syrian girls whom he had bought, he rudely dismissed her. Not yet, it is true, did he cease to wallow in pleasures and debaucheries, but now he seemed to be urged on by a desire to spite Lygia. At last he discerned that the thought of Lygia never left him

for a moment, that she was the motive at once of his bad actions and his good, that he cared for nothing in the world save only for her.

Then weariness and disgust overcame him. Pleasure became abhorrent to him, and left only remorse behind it. He knew he was wretched, but this last emotion filled him with immeasurable wonderment. Once he had accepted as good everything that gratified his senses.

In the end he fell into an utter apathy, from which even the news of Nero's approach could not arouse him. Nothing interested him. He did not even call on Petronius, until the latter sent him an invitation and his own letter.

Though he was joyfully greeted, he responded unwillingly to all interrogations. But at last his long-repressed thoughts and emotions burst their bounds and rushed from his lips in an abundant torrent of words. Once more he told in full detail the story of his search for Lygia, of his stay with the Christians, of all that he had seen and heard among them, and of all that had passed through his head and his heart.

And then he complained that he had plunged into a chaos of mind where all peace had abandoned him, together with all faculty of judgment and discernment. Nothing attracted him. Everything had lost its savor. He knew not what to think, nor how to act. He was ready both to honor Christ, and to persecute him. He recognized the sublimity of his creed, yet at the same time he felt towards it an overpowering aversion. He recognized that even if he possessed Lygia, he would not possess her entirely, for he must share her with Christ. In short, in the midst of life he had no real life, he had neither hope nor morrow, nor belief in happiness; he was encompassed by darkness and was groping for an exit which he could not find.

Petronius, during all this narration, gazed at his changed face, at his hands which he outstretched with a strange gesture, as if he were really groping his way, and pondered deeply. Then rising he approached Vinitius,

and ran his fingers through the hair above his ears.

"Knowest thou," he asked, "that there are several gray hairs on thy temple?"

"That may well be," was the reply; "I should not wonder if they should soon all grow white."

A hush fell upon them. Petronius was a man of thought. More than once had he pondered on life and the human soul. In a general way, life in the world wherein they both lived could be outwardly happy or unhappy, but inwardly its usual wont was calm. Just as lightning or earthquake might overthrow a temple, so unhappiness could destroy life. In itself, however, it consisted of simple and harmonious lines, free from all entanglements. But something altogether different was hinted at by the words of Vinitius. For the first time Petronius stood face to face with a complication of spiritual snarls which no one heretofore had unravelled. He was wise enough to value, but with all his cleverness he could not answer his nephew's questions. After a long pause he spoke.

"This may be mere sorcery."

"So I have thought. More than once has it seemed to me that both of us were under a spell."

"Suppose thou wert to go to the priests of Serapis? Doubtless among them there are many tricksters. Nevertheless, there may be others who possess strange secrets."

He spoke, however, without faith and in a halting voice. He felt how hollow and even ridiculous these words must sound on his lips.

Vinitius rubbed his forehead. "Sorceries!" he cried. "I have seen sorcerers who wrested unknown and subterranean forces to their own ends. I have seen sorcerers who used these forces to the injury of their foes. But Christians dwell in poverty, forgive their enemies, proclaim humility, virtue and charity. What could they gain from sorceries? Why should they cast spells?"

Petronius was piqued that all his wit could find no adequate reply. Unwilling to confess this, however, he jumped at the first thought that offered.

"'Tis a new sect," he said. After a pause he added: "By the divine dwellers in Paphian groves, how all this would ruin life! Thou admirest the purity and the mildness of those people, but I tell thee that they are evil, for they are enemies of life, even like diseases or death itself. We already have our fill of these enemies, we need no addition from the Christians. Count them up: diseases, Caesar, Tigellinus, Caesar's poems, cobblers who rule over the descendants of the old Quirites, freedmen who sit in the Senate. By Castor, 'tis enough! 'Tis a pernicious and disgusting sect. Hast thou made any effort to cast off this melancholy and take some small enjoyment out of life?"

"I have tried."

Petronius laughed. "Traitor!" he cried. "Gossip flies quickly among slaves. Thou has stolen Chrysothemis away from me."

Vinitius waved his hand in disgust.

"All the same, I thank thee," said Petronius. "I will send her a pair of slippers embroidered with pearls. In my love-language it means 'Walk off.' I owe thee a double gratitude, first that thou didst not steal Eunice, secondly, that thou didst free me from Chrysothemis. Hearken! Thou seest before thee a man who rose early, bathed, banqueted, possessed Chrysothemis, wrote satires, and even sometimes interwove poetry with prose, but who was as frightfully bored as Caesar himself, and often knew not how to chase away the gloomiest thoughts. Knowest thou why this was so? Merely because I was seeking afar what was right close to me. A beautiful woman is always worth her weight in gold, but if such a woman loves, she is above all price. The treasures of Verres could not purchase her. So now I set myself this rule of action. I shall fill my life with happiness, as a cup with the finest wine produced on earth, and drink till my hand withers and my lips pale. What may happen after I care not. This is my newest philosophy."

"'Tis the same thou hast always professed. There is nothing new in it."

"It has substance; something previously lacking."

He called for Eunice, who entered, clad in white drapery, golden-haired, a slave no longer, but a goddess of love and joy.

He opened his arms. "Come!" he cried.

She ran up to him. She leaped on his knee. She put her arms around his neck, and nestled her head upon his breast. Vinitius watched her cheeks grow crimson, and her eyes melt slowly in mist. They formed a marvellous group of love and happiness. Petronius reached his hand to a shallow vase standing on the nearby table, and taking a handful of violets, sprinkled them on the head, the breast and the robe of Eunice. He snatched the tunic from her shoulders and said:

"Happy is he who, like me, has found love enclosed in so lovely a form. At times I deem we are two gods. Look at her thyself. Hath Praxiteles, or Miron, or Scopas, or Lysias himself carved more marvellous lines? Is there in Paros or in Pentelius marble like this—warm, rosy, pulsating with love? There are men who kiss the edges of vases, but I prefer to seek delight where it can be truly found."

And he passed his lips over her shoulders and her neck. She trembled visibly, her eyes closed and then opened, with an expression of ineffable joy. Petronius lifted his noble head and addressed Vinitius.

"Think, now, what are thy gloomy Christians compared with this. If thou canst not see the difference, go to them. But this sight will cure thee."

Vinitius distended his nostrils, which were invaded by the perfume of violets that pervaded the room. His face paled. Oh, if he could only press his lips on the shoulders of Lygia, it would be a sacrilegious delight so great that the world might then pass away and he would care not. But accustomed now to a ready analysis of his own emotions, he noticed that even at that moment he thought of Lygia and her only.

"Eunice, thou divine one," cried Petronius, "order the garlands for our heads, and a good breakfast."

When she had left he turned to Vinitius.

"I would have set her free, but what was her answer? 'I would rather be thy slave than Caesar's wife.' She refused to accept her liberty. I freed her without her knowledge. The praetor did this for me without insisting on her presence. But she knows this not, nor does she know that this home, with all my jewels, save only the gems, will belong to her if I die."

He rose and took a few steps up and down the room.

"Love," he resumed, "changes some more, and others less. But it has greatly changed me. Once I loved the odor of verbenas. But Eunice prefers violets. Hence I love them above all other flowers, and since Spring arrived we have breathed nothing but violets."

He stopped in front of Vinitius.

"And thou," he asked, "dost thou still remain true to the perfume of nard?"

"Give me peace?" implored the young man.

"I wished thou to look on Eunice. I thought of her only because thou, too, perchance art seeking afar that which is near at hand. Perchance for thee too, in the dormitories of thy slaves, may throb some such loyal and simple heart. Put this balsam upon thy wounds. Lygia, thou sayest, loves thee. Granted she does. But what sort of love is that which can be renounced? Does not the very renouncement mean that there is something more powerful? No, my beloved, Lygia is not Eunice."

"'Tis all but one long torment. I saw thee kissing the shoulders of Eunice. And the thought came to me that if Lygia would bare her shoulders to me, the ground might open next minute under our feet, and I would not care. But an awful fear seized me at the very thought, as though I had assaulted a vestal virgin, or debauched a goddess. True, Lygia is not Eunice. But I see the difference in another way than thou. Love has changed thy nostrils so as to make thee prefer violets to verbenas. In me the change is in my soul, despite my fears and my desires, so that I prefer Lygia to be such as she is rather than to resemble others."

Petronius shrugged his shoulders. "If that be so, no wrong has been done thee. But I fail to understand."

"Alas, too true! We can understand each other no longer."

There was silence once more. Then Petronius resumed violently.

"May Hades engulf thy Christians! They have filled thee with unrest. They have destroyed thy hold upon life. To Hades with them! Thou art mistaken in thinking their creed is good. For good is that only which gives man happiness, and happiness consists in beauty, love, power. These things they call vanity. Thou art mistaken in thinking they are just, for if we must return good for evil, what shall we return for good? And if the same return be made for good and evil, why shall man be good?"

"No, the return is not the same. According to their creed, it begins in a future life, which is eternal."

"The future life does not interest me, for we have yet to find whether we can see without eyes. In this life the Christians are mere weaklings. Ursus strangled Croto because he has limbs of iron, but these are imbeciles, and the future cannot belong to imbeciles."

"I told you that for them life begins with death."

"That is as if one were to say, 'Day begins with night.' Dost thou propose to carry off the girl?"

"No, I cannot return evil for her good. Moreover, I have sworn not to do so."

"Dost thou contemplate accepting the religion of Christ?"

"I wish to do so, but my nature revolts."

"Canst thou forget Lygia?"

"No."

"Then travel."

Breakfast was now announced by the slaves. Petronius, who thought he had hit upon a good idea, said on the way to the dining-room:

"Thou hast travelled over a large part of the world, but only as a soldier hurrying to his destination who does not

stop on the way. Go with us to Achaia. Caesar has not given up the idea. He will stop along the way, will sing, receive garlands, despoil temples, and in the end will return in triumph to Italy. 'Twill be like a procession of Bacchus and Apollo in one person. Augustales and their consorts and thousands of lyres. By Castor! 'twill be well worth seeing, for nothing like it has ever existed in the world."

He stretched himself beside Eunice on a couch before the table. A slave placed a garland of anemones upon his head.

"What didst thou see in the service of Corbulo?" he resumed. "Nothing! Didst thou visit the Grecian temple as I did, I, who for two years passed from guide to guide? Didst thou visit Rhodes to view the site of the Colossus? Didst thou see in Panopeus, in Phocis, the clay from which Prometheus moulded man, in Sparta the eggs which Leda laid, or, in Athens, the famed Sarmatian armor made of horses' hoofs, or in Euboea, Agamemnon's ship; or the goblet which was modelled over the left breast of Helena? Didst thou see Alexandria, Memphis, the Pyramids, the hair of Isis which she tore out of her head in bewailing Osiris? Didst thou hear the moaning music of Memnon? The world is wide. All does not end at the Trans-Tiber. I shall accompany Caesar. On his return I shall leave him and go to Cyprus, for my little golden-haired goddess desires that we should together offer up doves to Venus. For know, that what she wishes must be done."

"I am thy slave," whispered Eunice.

He leaned his wreathed head upon her bosom and smiled.

"If so I am the slave of a slave," he said. "From thy feet to thy head, oh my divinity! I love thee."

Turning to Vinitius he said: "Go with us to Cyprus. Remember that thou must first call on Caesar. 'Tis a pity that thou hast not yet seen him. Tigellinus is only too ready to use this to thy harm. Though he has no per-

sonal hatred to thee, still, as my sister's son, he cannot love thee. We will explain that thou wert unwell. We must think over what reply thou shalt give if Nero asks about Lygia. It might be best for thee to make a gesture with thy hands and say that she was with thee until she wearied thee. This he will understand. And that sickness detained thee at home; that thy fever was increased by sorrow that thou couldst not be present in Naples to hear his singing, that thy health was only restored by the hope of now at last hearing him. Fear no lie, no exaggeration. Tigellinus swears he will think of something stupendous to say to Ceasar. I fear he may undermine me. I have some fears even for thee."

"Knowest thou," said Vinitius, "that there are men who do not fear Caesar, and who live as calmly as if he were not in the same world?"

"I know whom thou meanest—the Christians."

"Yes. They are the only ones. But as to us, what is our life save a constant fear?"

"A truce to the Christians. They fear not Caesar, because it is possible he has never heard of them. At all events he knows nothing of their creed, and they interest him no more than withered leaves. But I tell thee they are imbeciles. Thou feelest this thyself. If thy nature revolts at their creed, 'tis because thou feelest their imbecility. Thou art a man of different clay. Therefore a truce to them. We can live and die, what more they can do no one knows."

These words struck Vinitius. On his return home he wondered whether after all it might not be true that the charity and purity of the Christians was but a sign of their imbecility. Surely men of virility and character could not forgive in this way. Was not this the real secret of the aversion which his Roman soul felt towards this creed? "We can live and die," said Petronius. As to them they knew forgiveness only, they knew neither true love nor true hatred.

CHAPTER VIII

Nero soon wearied of Rome, regretted his return, and decided on a new visit to Achaia. He issued an edict explaining that his absence would not be a long one, and that public affairs would not suffer in any way. Accompanied by the Augustales, among whom was Vinitius, he repaired to the Capitol to offer sacrifices for an auspicious journey. But next day at the temple of Vesta, an event took place which changed all his plans. Nero had no belief in the gods. But he feared them. The mysterious Vesta, especially, filled him with such dread, that in the presence of the goddess and her sacred fire, his hair rose on end, his teeth chattered, a shiver ran through his lips, and he fainted in the arms of Vinitius, who happened to stand behind him.

They carried him out of the temple and bore him to the Palatine. Though he soon recovered consciousness, he did not leave his bed all that day. To the amazement of all present he announced that he had deferred his journey, for that the goddess had secretly warned from undue haste. An hour later it was publicly announced in Rome that Caesar seeing the saddened visages of his people, towards whom he felt as a father to his children, would remain to share their joys and their fate. The mob rejoiced at this decision which assured them a continuance of the games and bread, assembled in large numbers before the Palatine gate, and shouted loud and long in honor of divine Caesar. The latter, pausing a moment from the game of dice with which he was amusing himself with the Augustales, said:

"Yes, it was right to defer the journey. It hath been prophesied that Egypt and the Orient cannot escape from my dominion. Hence I will not lose Achaia. I will order a canal to be cut through the Isthmus of Corinth and we will erect monuments in Egypt which will make the Pyramids seem childish toys. I will build a Sphinx seven times larger than that which gazes at the

desert from Memphis, and will command that my face be put upon it. Succeeding ages will talk only of this monument and of me."

"In thy verses thou hast already erected a monument not seven times merely, but thrice seven times greater than the Pyramid of Cheops," said Petronius.

"And what of my singing?" asked Nero.

"Alas, could men only raise to thee a statue like that of Memnon, to resound with thy voice at sunrise! Then, indeed, for all ages would the neighboring seas swarm with vessels, in which crowds from all three parts of the earth would come to hearken to thy voice."

"Alas, indeed! What man could do this?" answered Nero.

"Nevertheless, thou canst order a figure of thyself driving a chariot to be carved in basalt."

"'Tis true! I will do it."

"That will, indeed, be a boon to humanity."'

"In Egypt I will wed with the Moon, who is now a widow, and be a god in fact."

"Yea, and thou wilt give us stars for wives. And we will form a new constellation which shall be known as the constellation of Nero. Wed Vitellius with the Nile so that he breed hippopotamuses. Give the desert to Tigellinus and let him become the king of the jackals."

"And what shall I have?" asked Vatinius.

"May Apis bless thee! Thou hast given us such magnificent games in Beneventum, that I can wish thee no evil. Make a pair of boots for the Sphinx, whose paws mayhap grow cold in the night-dews, and sandals for the Colossi which line the ways leading to the temples. So each may find a suitable occupation. For instance, Domitius Afer, famed for his honesty, will be the treasurer. I rejoice, oh Caesar, when thou dreamest of Egypt. I am only sorry because thou hast put off thy journey."

"Your mortal eyes saw not," answered Nero, "for

the goddess becomes invisible to whom she wills. Know that when I was in the temple of Vesta, she herself stood beside me, and said in my ear, 'Go not as yet.' This unexpected thing affrighted me, though I ought to be grateful for so marked a sign of the protection of the gods."

"We were all affrighted," put in Tigellinus. "The vestal Rubria fainted."

"Rubria," cried Nero, "what a snowy neck she has!"

"But she blushes at sight of thee, divine Caesar."

"Yes, I have noticed this. 'Tis strange. There is something divine in every vestal, and Rubria is most beautiful."

He pondered for a moment. Then he resumed: "Tell me, why is it that men fear Vesta more than other gods? What is the reason? I myself was affrighted to-day, though I am the High Priest. I can just remember that I was falling backward, and should have struck the ground had not some one supported me. Who was he?"

"I," answered Vinitius.

"What, thou; oh, fierce Ares. Why wert thou not in Beneventum? I was told that thou wert sick. In truth thy face has changed. But I heard that Croto sought to kill thee. Is this true?"

"Yea, it is. He broke my arm, but I succeeded in defending myself."

"With the broken arm?"

"A Barbarian helped me, who was stronger than Croto."

Nero stared with amazement. "Stronger than Croto? Surely thou art jesting. Croto was the strongest of men, but now the Aethiopian Syphax hath that honor."

"I only tell thee, Caesar, what mine own eyes have seen."

"Where is the pearl? Has he become King of Nemi?"

"I know not, Caesar. I have lost him from sight."

"But thou knowest at least to what nation he belongs?"

"Nay, I had a broken arm, and no heart for questioning."

"Seek, and find him for me."

"I will take that upon myself," said Tigellinus.

Nero continued still addressing Vinitius. "I thank thee for having supported me. A fall might have broken my head. Once thou wert a boon companion. But since thy campaign with Corbulo thou hast become unsociable and I seldom see thee." He paused, and then resumed: "What of the maiden with the narrow hips whom thou didst love and whom I took from the Auli for thee?"

Vinitius grew confused. Luckily Petronius stepped in to his aid.

"I will wager thee, oh lord, that he has forgotten her. See how confused he is. Ask him how many successors that maiden has had. He will be unable to answer. The Vinitii are good soldiers, but still better breeders. Punish him, oh Lord! Invite him not to the banquet which Tigellinus has promised to prepare in thy honor on the part of Agrippa."

"Nay, not that. I trust that Tigellinus will not allow us to lack for beauties."

"How could the Graces be absent where Cupid is present?" said Tigellinus.

"Spleen devours me," sighed Nero. "I have remained in Rome at the bidding of the goddess, but I cannot bear it. I will go to Antium. I suffocate in these narrow streets, amid these falling houses, these foul alleys. Stenches of all sorts reach even here to my house and gardens. Would that an earthquake might destroy Rome, or that some angry god might raze it to the ground. Then I would show you how a city ought to be built worthy to be the head of the world, and my capital."

"Caesar," said Tigellinus, "thou sayest, would that some angry god might destroy the city. Dost thou mean this?"

"Yes, but what then?"

"Art thou not a god?"

Nero waved his hand with a gesture of weariness.

"We shall see what thou art preparing for us on the pond of Agrippa. Later I will go to Antium. Ye are small and understand not what great things I need."

Then he closed his eyes as an indication that he needed rest. The Augustales withdrew. Petronius accompanied Vinitius from the imperial presence.

"So it appears that thou art invited to take part in our amusements. Bronzebeard has given up his journey. But on that account he will grow madder than ever. He will treat the city as though it were simply his own house. Seek thou distraction and oblivion in the outcome of that madness. Well, by Pluto! we have conquered the whole world. We have now a right to amuse ourselves. Thou, Marcus, art a comely lad, that is one reason why I like thee. By Diana of Ephesus, couldst thou only see thy manly brow, thy face in which shines the ancient blood of the Quirites! Others look like freedmen beside thee. Yea, were it not for her wild creed, Lygia would be to-day in thy house. Attempt no further argument with me that the Christians are not enemies of life and of humanity. They behaved well to thee. Be grateful an thou wilt. But in thy place I should hate their religion, and seek pleasure wherever it can be found. I repeat that thou art a comely lad, and Rome swarms with divorces."

"My only wonder is that this does not pain thee."

"Who says so? I have long been pained by it. But I am not of thy age. And I have tastes which thou dost lack. I love books. Thou carest naught for them. I love poetry, gems and myriads of things to which thou wouldst not spare a glance; I have pains in my back, which thou hast not; and to conclude, I have found Eunice and thou hast found nothing to resemble her. I feel pleasure in my own home, among works of art. I will never make an aesthete of thee. I know that in life I will find nothing above what I have already found. As to thee, thou art constantly expecting and seeking something. Should death come to thee, notwithstanding

thy courage and thy melancholy, thou wouldst die with wonder at the thought of leaving the world. I, on the other hand, would accept it as a necessity, satisfied that there is no fruit in this world which I had not tasted. I neither hurry nor lag behind. I shall only strive to enjoy myself to the last. The world is full of cheerful sceptics. I look on the Stoics as fools, but Stoicism at least gives fortitude to men, while thy Christians bring gloom into the world, and gloom in life is like rain in nature. Knowest thou what I have learned? That as an adjunct to the banquet which Tigellinus is preparing, temporary houses of assignation will be established on the pond of Agrippa, and therein will be gathered women from the first families in Rome. Mayst thou not find there some one beautiful enough to console thee? There will be virgins even, making their first steps into the world, as nymphs. Such is our Roman Caesardom. The weather is still pleasant, the south wind will warm the water, yet not bring out pimples upon nude bodies. And know, Narcissus, that not one will be there to resist thee, not one, even though she be a vestal virgin."

Vinitius tapped his hand with his palm, like a man possessed by one thought.

"Perchance it may be my fate to meet such a woman."

"It happened to thee among the Christians. But people whose symbol is a cross cannot be other than they are. Listen. Greece was beautiful and created the wisdom of the world; we created power. And what, thinkest thou, can this religion create? It thou knowest explain it to me, for by Pollux, I cannot conceive."

Vinitius shrugged his shoulders.

"One might think that thou fearest I may become a Christian."

"I am afraid thou hast ruined thy life. If thou canst not be Greece, be Rome, possess and enjoy. Our very insanities have a certain sanity, for at least they clothe a thought. I despise Bronzebeard, because he is a Greek mountebank. If he acted Roman, I would assert

that he was right in his worst insanity. Promise me that if on thy return thou meetest a Christian thou wilt stick out thy tongue at him. If it be the physician, Glaucus, he will not be surprised. So farewell, till we meet again on the pond of Agrippa."

CHAPTER IX

The groves by the pond of Agrippa were surrounded by pretorians, so that the multitude of spectators might not be in the way of Nero and his guests. Everybody in Rome distinguished for wit, beauty or intellect, thronged to the banquet. Nothing to equal it had ever been known in the chronicles of the city. Tigellinus desired to reward Caesar for postponing the journey to Achaia, to excel all who had ever feasted Nero, and to prove that no one could amuse and entertain him so magnificently.

To this end, while with Caesar at Naples and later at Beneventum, he had made his preparations. He had sent orders to the remotest parts of the world for beasts, birds, rare fishes and plants, and for such vessels and clothes as would increase the splendor of the occasion. The revenues of entire provinces were lavished in the maddest plans. The all-powerful favorite had nothing to restrain him. His influence waxed greater every day. Tigellinus was not more beloved by Nero than others, but he had grown indispensable. Petronius incomparably excelled him in culture, intellect, and wit. His conversation was far more amusing to Caesar. Unhappily he excelled Caesar himself. He awoke the tyrant's jealousy. He knew not how to be a willing tool in all things. When it came to matters of taste Caesar feared his opinion. With Tigellinus, on the other hand, Nero felt no constraint. The very name, Arbiter Elegantiarum, bestowed by the general voice upon Petronius, piqued Nero's vanity, for who save himself deserved the title? Tigellinus had sense enough to recognize his own limitations. Knowing

that he could not compete with Petronius, or Lucan, or others who were conspicuous either by lineage, talents, or knowledge, he made up his mind to extinguish them by the loyalty of his services, and by the evocation of a splendor that should dazzle Nero.

For the banquet itself he had prepared a monster raft, built of gilded beams. Its edges were decorated with exquisite shells, fished from the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, which glittered with all the colors of the rainbow. On every side were groups of palms, groves of lotus, and roses in full bloom. Amidst these were hidden fountains that sprinkled perfumes, statues of gods, and gold and silver cages full of birds of brilliantly varied plumage. A tent, or rather the top of a tent, of Syrian purple, rested on silver columns. Within, the tables prepared for the guests sparkled, like miniature suns, with Alexandrian glass, crystals and priceless vessels, all plundered from Italy, Greece and Asia Minor. The raft, which looked like an island garden, was connected by ropes of gold and purple with boats fashioned like fishes, swans, seagulls and flamingoes, wherein beside painted oars sat nude oarsmen and oarswomen with forms and faces of marvellous beauty, their hair dressed in Oriental modes, or caught in golden nets.

On Nero's arrival, with Poppaea and his Augustales on the main raft, where they seated themselves under the tent roof, the boats moved, the oars splashed into the waters, and in the reflections from golden instruments the banquet and the guests described circles in the pond. Surrounding it were other boats and other rafts, filled with female lute players and harpists whose pink bodies against the blue background of the heaven and the waters, and in the reflections from golden instruments seemed to absorb into themselves this blue and those reflections, ever changing and blooming like flowers.

From the groves on the banks, from the gorgeous buildings erected for the day and hidden in the dense foliage, resounded music and song. All the neighborhood and all the groves responded. The echoes scattered

around the clangor of horns and trumpets. Caesar himself, with Poppaea on one side and Pythagoras on the other, marvelled at the sight, and marvelled the more when young maids, masquerading as sirens, and covered with green net work in imitation of scales, spared no praises to Tigellinus. But he glanced up at Petronius from habit, anxious for the opinion of "the arbiter." The latter bore himself indifferently, and only when directly questioned made answer:

"It seems to me, oh, Lord, that ten thousand nude maidens make less impression than one."

None the less the floating banquet pleased Nero as a novelty. Moreover, such exquisite dishes were served that even the imagination of Apicius would have been outdone, and wines of so many kinds that Otho, who was wont to serve eighty, would have hidden under the waters for shame if this luxury had been revealed to him. Besides the women, there were only Augustales at the tables. Among all these Vinitius was prominent in beauty. Of yore his face and figure had indicated the soldier by profession. But now pain and sorrow had chiselled the features, as if the plastic hand of a master sculptor had passed over them. His skin had lost the sunburn that had tanned it. There remained on it the golden tinge of Numidian marble. His eyes had grown large and melancholy. But his body retained the powerful lines which had always made it seem as if created for armor. Above the body of a soldier sat the head of a Grecian god, or at least a refined patrician, at once subtle and splendid. When Petronius had told Vinitius that none of the ladies of the court either could or would resist him, he spoke as a man of experience. All turned their eyes to him, even Poppaea, even the vestal Rubria, whom Caesar had commanded should be invited.

Wines, chilled in mountain snows, soon warmed the hearts and heads of guests. From out the thickets overhanging the shores shot new boats, fashioned like grasshoppers and dragon flies. The blue surface of the water

seemed as if strewn with the petals of flowers, or sprinkled with butterflies. Here and there above the boats floated doves and other birds from India and Africa, held fast by threads of silver and blue. The sun had already overrun the greater part of the sky. Though it was now only the beginning of May, its rays were warm and even hot. The waters rippled with the splash of oars moving in time with the music. No breath of air was stirring. The groves stood motionless, as if lost in contemplation of the sounds and scenes in the water. The raft circled continuously on the pond bearing guests who were becoming drunker and noisier.

Before the banquet was half over the order in which the guests had been ranged at table was utterly disrupted. Nero himself had set the example. Rising from his couch he ordered Vinitius to yield his place, which was beside the vestal Rubria. Into the ears of the vestal Nero whispered in soft tones. Vinitius found himself next to Poppaea. She stretched out her arm to him, and asked him to fasten her loosened bracelet. His hands trembled as he did so. From under her long lashes she shot glances as of modesty, shaking her golden head meanwhile as with denial.

The sun, grown larger and redder, slowly sank behind the crests of groves. Most of the guests were now boisterously intoxicated. Nearer to the shore circled the craft. Groups of mummies were discovered among trees and flowers. They were disguised as fauns and satyrs. They played on flutes, bag-pipes and cymbals. They were surrounded by groups of maidens, representing nymphs, dryades, and hamadryades. Darkness closed in upon drunken shouts in honor of Luna resounding from beneath the tent. The groves were lit up with thousands of lamps. From the houses standing on the shore shone myriads of lamps. On the terraces disported new groups, naked like the others, consisting of the wives and daughters of the greatest families in Rome. With voluptuous movements they called to the guests.

At last the raft touched the banks. Caesar and the Augustales vanished in the groves, and scattered themselves through the shameful houses, or in tents hidden in the foliage, and grottoes artificially made among the springs and fountains.

Madness seized on every one. No one knew whither Caesar had disappeared. No one knew who was a senator, who a knight, who a musician. Satyrs and fauns pursued the nymphs. With their Bacchic staffs they struck at the lamps to extinguish them. Darkness fell on many parts of the groves. Everywhere was heard the sound of laughter, or shouts, or whisperings, or the panting of human breasts. Rome had never seen the like of this before.

Vinitius was not drunk, as at the feast in Caesar's palace where Lygia had appeared. But ashamed and bewildered by all that was going on around him, the fever of pleasure seized upon him also. Plunging into the forest, he ran around with the others, seeking the dryad that might seem to him most beautiful. New groups of naked women fled by him with songs and shouts, pursued by fauns, satyrs, senators and knights. Music was everywhere. At last his eyes caught a band of maidens led by one clad as Diana. He sprang forward. He sought a closer look at the goddess. And then his heart stopped in his breast. He thought that in that goddess, with the crescent moon in her hair, he recognized Lygia.

They formed around him in a circling group, all frenzied with emotion. Then, as if they wished him to pursue, they flew away like a herd of antelopes. He stood rooted on the spot. His heart throbbed wildly. The Diana was not indeed Lygia. At close view she did not even resemble her. But the awful fear had exhausted him. Then there came upon him a longing for Lygia such as he had never before experienced. A tremendous wave of love surged into his breast. Never had she seemed to him dearer, purer and more beloved than in this moment of madness and debauchery. A

moment ago he himself could have drunk from this cup, and taken part in this dissipation and shameless sensuality, but now disgust and abhorrence mastered him. He felt himself stifling. He needed air and the sight of the stars hidden by these infamous groves. He started to fly. But ere he could move, a veiled figure appeared before him. It placed its hands upon his shoulders, and pouring its burning breath in his face whispered:

"I love thee. Come! None will see us. Make haste."

Vinitius awoke as from a dream.

"Who art thou?"

She leaned her breast against him and repeated:

"Make haste! We are alone, and I love thee. Come!"

"Who art thou?"

"Guess."

And through her veil she pressed her lips to his, drawing his face to hers, till at length breath failed her, and she snatched her face away.

" 'Tis a night of love! A night of liberty!" she cried, catching her breath with an effort. "To-day everything is allowed. Take me!"

That kiss burned into Vinitius like acid. It filled him with renewed aversion. His soul and heart were elsewhere. For him in the whole world Lygia alone existed. So, thrusting the veiled figure aside, he cried:

"Whoever thou art, I love another. I wish thee not."

She bent her head. "Remove the veil!" she said, imperiously.

At that moment the leaves of a nearby myrtle rustled. The figure vanished like a vision, but as she escaped in the distance, her laugh rang back, with a strangely ominous sound.

Petronius appeared from the thickets.

"I have heard and seen all," he said.

"Let us go hence," replied Vinitius.

They passed the houses of shame, all gleaming with light, passed the groves and the line of mounted pretorians. Reaching their litters, Petronius said:

"I will go with thee to thy house."

They got into a litter together. Both were silent until they reached the great hall in Vinitius's house. Then Petronius spoke.

"Knowest thou who that was?" he asked.

"Rubria?" queried Vinitius, with a shudder at the very thought for Rubria was a vestal.

"No."

"Who was it, then?"

Petronius lowered his voice.

"The fire of Vesta hath been defiled, for Rubria was with Caesar. But she who spoke to thee," and he spoke still lower, "was the divine Augusta."

A hush fell upon them.

"Caesar," resumed Petronius, "failed to conceal from her his passion for Rubria. So she may have wished to revenge herself. But I interrupted thee, for the reason that hadst thou refused the Augusta after recognizing her, nothing could have saved thee, nor Lygia, nor perchance myself."

Vinitius, broke out fiercely. "Enough of Rome, enough of Caesar, of banquets, of the Augusta, of Tigellinus and the rest of you. I am suffocating. I cannot live in this way. I cannot! Dost thou understand?"

"Thou art losing thy head, Vinitius."

"But she is the only thing I love."

"Well, what of it?"

"Just this much—I want no other love. I want nothing else—neither your life, nor your banquets, nor your shamelessness, nor your crimes."

"What ails thee? Art thou a Christian?"

The young man dropped his head in his hands, and despairingly cried:

"Not yet! Not yet!"

CHAPTER X

Petronius went home shrugging his shoulders. His mind was ill at ease. He saw clearly that he and Vinitius no longer understood each other, that a gulf yawned between them. Once he wielded an immense influence over the young soldier. He had been set up by the latter as a model in everything. A sarcastic word from Petronius could sway him either one way or the other. Now all was changed, so completely that Petronius dared not essay his old methods. Wit and irony, he felt, would glide ineffectually from the new layers deposited in the mind of Vinitius by contact with those incomprehensible Christians.

The experienced skeptic knew that he had lost the key to that soul. Discontent and even fear followed, aggravated by the events of that night.

"Should it be no passing whim in the mind of Augusta," he thought, "but a permanent passion, one of two things will happen. Either Vinitius will yield and possibly be ruined by some untoward accident, or, what is more probable, he will resist, and then he will surely perish. And I as his relative may perish with him. Augusta, including the whole family in her wrath, will throw her entire influence on the side of Tigellinus. Both horns of the dilemma are unpleasant."

Petronius was a brave man. He had no fear of death. But as he expected nothing from death he did not court it. After long thought he at last decided that the safest course would be to send Vinitius away from Rome on a journey. Ah, could he only add Lygia as a travelling companion, how gladly would he have done it. Still, he hoped it would be no hard task to induce him to go alone. He would spread the report in the Palatine that Vinitius was sick. This would save both the nephew and the uncle. Augusta could not be sure that

she had been recognized by Vinitius. She might easily believe that she was not, and in that case her vanity had not yet been hopelessly wounded. But the future might open her eyes. That was the danger most to be avoided.

Of all things Petronius wished to gain time. He foresaw that if Nero went to Achaia, Tigellinus, who had no understanding of art, would descend to a secondary place. In Greece, Petronius knew himself certain of victory over all rivals.

Meanwhile, he resolved to keep his eye on Vinitius, and win his consent to the journey. For several days he pondered over a project to obtain from Caesar an edict banishing the Christians from Rome. Then Lygia would depart with the other confessors of Christ. After her would go Vinitius. There would be no further need for persuasion. The thing itself was possible. In fact, it was not so long since that the Jews had raised disturbances against the Christians. Claudius, unable to distinguish one from the other, had ejected the Jews. Why should not Nero eject the Christians? Rome would be less crowded without them.

After the floating banquet Petronius saw Nero daily, either in the Palatine or other houses. It would be easy to suggest this idea to him, for Nero never resented suggestions that would bring pain or ruin to others. After mature reflection, Petronius hit upon a plan. He would give a feast in his own home. At that feast he would obtain the edict from Caesar. He had even a hope, not entirely fallacious, that Caesar might entrust him with its execution. Then he would send Lygia out of Rome with all the consideration due to the mistress of Vinitius. They might go to Baiae if they chose, and amuse themselves with love and with Christianity to their heart's content.

He made frequent visits to Vinitius. With all his Roman egoism, he could not forego his love for his young kinsman. Besides he wished to urge him to the journey. Vinitius was now feigning sickness, and never

showed himself upon the Palatine. There new plans were evolved every day. At last Petronius heard definitely, from Caesar's own lips, that in three days he would set out for Antium. Next day he reported the news to Vinitius. The latter had already heard it. That very morning a freedman had brought him a list of the people invited by Caesar.

"My name is among them, and so is thine," he said. "Thou wilt find the same list at thy home when thou returnest."

"Were not I among the invited guests," returned Petronius, "it would mean that I had been selected for death. But I hardly expected that such an omission would occur before the journey to Achaia. There I shall be too indispensable to Nero."

He examined the list.

"Hardly have we returned to Rome," he complained, "but we must leave again and drag ourselves to Antium. There is no alternative. This is no mere invitation. It is a command—"

"And suppose one should not obey?"

"He would receive an invitation to quite a different journey, one from which no traveller returns. Pity thou didst not take my advice and depart from Rome in time. Now there is no help for it. Thou must go to Antium."

"I must go to Antium? See in what times we live, what base slaves we are!"

"Is this the first time thou hast noticed it?"

"No. But thy argument has been that Christianity is an enemy to life, since it casts it into shackles. Would the shackles be any harder than these we are wearing? Thou hast said, 'Greece created wisdom and beauty, and Rome power.' Where is our power?"

"Summon Chilo to thee. Converse with him. I have no inclination to philosophize to-day. By Hercules! 'Twas not I that created these times, nor have I to answer for them. Talk we of Antium. Know that great peril awaits thee there. It might be safer to try a fall

with that barbarian who strangled Croto. Nevertheless, thou canst not refuse."

Vinitius carelessly waved his hand.

"Danger?" he sniffed. "We are all groping in the shadow of death, and every moment some head disappears in that shadow."

"Shall I remind thee of all those, who, possessing a little sense, went safely through the times of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero, for eighty or ninety years? Place before thee as an example even such a man as Domitius Afer. He has grown old undisturbed, though all his life long he has been a thief and a scoundrel."

"Perhaps that was the reason," said Vinitius.

He glanced over the list and read, "Tigellinus, Vatinius, Sextus Africanus, Aguilinus Regulus, Suilius Nerulinces, Eprius Marcellus, and so on, and so on. What a precious lot of blackguards and scoundrels! And these men govern the world! Would they not be better employed in carrying some Egyptian or Syrian divinity through the towns for public exhibition, or in earning their bread by fortune-telling or dancing?"

"Yes, or by exhibiting educated monkeys, calculating dogs, or flute-playing donkeys," added Petronius. "True enough! But let us talk of something more important. Collect thy wits, and listen to me. On the Palatine, I have reported that thou art sick, and canst not leave thy home. But thy name is on this list. Evidently, somebody does not believe me, and has done this with a purpose. The matter is of no importance to Nero, for thou art only a soldier, with whom at the best he could only converse about the races in the circus. Thou hast no conception of poetry and music. So it is Poppaea who hath had thy name placed on the list. This means that her passion is no mere caprice of the moment, but that she wishes to win thee."

"She is an audacious Augusta."

"Audacious indeed! For she may destroy thee beyond redemption. May Venus inspire her with some

other love as speedily as possible! But as she has cast a wanton eye upon thee, we must exercise the greatest caution. Bronzebeard is beginning to weary of her. He prefers Rubria or Pythagoras, but his very vanity would impel him to wreak the most hideous vengeance upon you both."

"I knew not it was she who addressed me in the grove. Thou wert listening. Thou knowest my answer, that I loved another, and wished nothing of her."

"By all the Plutonian gods! I implore thee not to lose the remnant of thy reason which the Christians have left thee! How can one hesitate when the choice lies between probable and certain ruin? Have I not already explained that if thou hadst wounded the Augusta's vanity, no rescue would have been possible? By Hades! If thou art tired of life, 'twere better to open thy veins, or throw thyself upon thy sword, for if thou offendest Poppaea, no such easy death will comfort thee. Now, what is thy purpose? Wilt thou lose aught on thy affair? Will it hinder thy love for Lygia? Remember one thing: Poppaea saw Lygia on the Palatine. 'Twill be easy for her to guess for whose sake thou neglectest such exalted favors. Then she will drag Lygia forth, even from the bowels of the earth. Thou wilt destroy, not merely thyself, but Lygia also. Dost thou comprehend?"

Vinitius listened as though his thoughts were elsewhere.

"I must see her," he said at last.

"Whom—Lygia?"

"Lygia."

"Knowest thou where she is?"

"No."

"And wilt thou resume thy search for her in old cemeteries and in the Trans-Tiber?"

"I know not. But I must see her."

"Well, though she be a Christian she may have more sense than thou. She may have sense enough not to wish thy destruction."

Vinitius shrugged his shoulders: "She saved me from the hands of Ursus."

"Then hurry, for Bronzebeard will not delay this journey. He can issue sentences of death in Antium as well as here."

Vinitius was not listening. One only thought possessed him, to obtain an interview with Lygia. He pondered ways and means.

Then something happened which seemed to remove all obstacles. Chilo called upon him unexpectedly next morning.

He came wretched and ragged. Signs of hunger were in his face. But as the servants had received orders to admit him at all hours of the day or night, they dared not deny him admittance. He went straight to the great hall, and saluted Vinitius:

"May the gods give thee immortality, and share with thee the dominion of the world."

Vinitius's first thought was to command that the Greek should be cast out of doors. His next was that the Greek might know something about Lygia. Curiosity conquered aversion.

"'Tis thou?" he asked. "How is it with thee?"

"Badly enough, oh, son of Jupiter! Virtue is a ware which nobody prizes nowadays. The true philosopher must be content if only once in five days he is able to procure a sheep's head from the butcher, and gnaw it in his garret, washing it down with tears. Master, what thou gavest me I spent on books. And I was robbed and ruined. And the slave who should have written down the wisdom that I was ready to dictate fled with the remnant of thy generosity. I am destitute. But I thought to myself, whither should I turn save to thee, oh, Serapis, whom I love and adore, and for whom I have jeopardized my life."

"Why hast thou come, and what brings thee?"

"To seek help, oh, Baal! I bring you my wretchedness, my tears, my love, and the news which I have gathered for love of thee. Rememberest thou, master,

that I once told thee I had given to a slave of the divine Petronius a thread from the girdle of the Venus of Paphos? I sought to discover if it had helped her. Thou, oh, Son of the Sun, who knowest all that goes on in that house, knowest what position Eunice holds there. One other such thread do I possess. I have preserved it for thee, oh, master!"

He stopped short. Wrath was gathering upon the brow of Vinitius. Chilo, wishing to appease the rising storm, resumed quickly:

"I know where the divine Lygia resides. I will show thee, master, the alley, and the house."

Vinitius suppressed the emotion which this news caused him.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"With Linus, the oldest of the Christian priests. Ursus is there also. He still continues his visits to the miller—the namesake of thy overseer. Demas, yes, Demas! Ursus works at nights. Hence, if thou surround the house after dark he will not be there. Linus is old. Besides him there are only two women, still older, in the house."

"How dost thou know this?"

"Thou wilt remember, master, that the Christians had me in their power and spared me. 'Tis true that Glaucus was mistaken in imagining that I was the cause of his misfortune, but the poor devil believed this, and still believes it. And, in spite of all, they spared me. No wonder, master, that gratitude filled my heart. I am a relict of the good old days. So I thought to myself, should I desert my friends and benefactors? Would it not be ungrateful on my part not to ask after them, not to learn how they were getting along, whether they were sick or well, where and how they live? By Cybele of Pessinunt! it is not in me to act thus. But I feared at first that they might possibly misconceive my motives. Affection proved stronger than fear, the more so that I was encouraged by the readiness with which they forgive injuries. And, above all, master, I thought of thee.

Our last adventure ended unhappily. But can a son of Fortune reconcile himself to defeat? With this idea I prepared victory for thee in advance. The house stands apart. Slaves at thy order can surround it so completely that not a mouse could escape. Oh, master, master, it depends only on thee whether this magnanimous king's daughter spend this night in thy house. If this should happen, remember that it was the poor and hungry son of my father who compassed thy happiness."

The blood rushed to the head of Vinitius. Temptation once more shook his whole being. Yes, that was the way, this time a certain one. Lygia once in his house, who could take her away? Once his mistress, what would be left her save to remain so forever? Let religions perish. What could the Christians do for him, with their charity and their gloomy creed? Had not the time come for him to shake off these dreams? Why should he not live as others lived? Lygia might find it difficult to reconcile her faith with what had befallen her. But what of that? The only important thing was that she should be his, and his that very night. Doubtless her faith would not hold out against this new world, against the delights of the passion to which she would surrender herself. And to-day was the day! He had but to detain Chilo, and give orders at nightfall. Then would come joys without end.

"What has my life been," thought Vintitius, "save gloom, unsatisfied passion, and an endless propounding of unanswerable questions?"

Now he had the chance to end it all. True, he had sworn not to raise a hand against Lygia. But in whose name had he sworn? Not by the gods, for he no longer believed in them. Not by Christ, for as yet he did not believe in Him. For the rest, if she felt that she were wronged, he would marry her and so wipe out the wrong. Yea, he must do this, for he owed his life to her.

He recalled the day when he and Croto had invaded her retreat. He recalled the fist of Ursus raised above

him, and all that had happened thereafter. Again he saw her bending over his couch, clad in the garb of a slave, beautiful as a goddess, merciful and adorable. Unconsciously his glance fell on the sanctuary and on the cross which she had left behind her. Should he repay her for all by a renewed attack? Should he drag her by the hair like a slave to his bed? How could he do this, when he not only desired but loved her, and when he loved her for the very reason that she was what she was?

Then he knew that it would not be enough for him to have her in his house, not enough to clasp her in his arms by force. His love needed something more, her consent, her love, her soul. Blessed would be that roof if she came under it of her own free will, blessed the moment, the day, life itself. Then the happiness of both would be inexhaustible as the sea and the sun. But to possess her by force would be to ruin that happiness forever, and at the same time to tarnish and make hideous the only precious and beloved thing in life.

Horror seized him at the very thought. He glanced at Chilo, who, staring back, hid his hands under his rags and scratched himself uneasily. In a frenzy of unspeakable aversion, Vinitius would fain have crushed under foot that former ally of his, as one crushes a foul worm or a poisonous serpent. In an instant he made up his mind. But knowing no measure in anything, and yielding to his fierce Roman nature, he cried:

"I will not do as thou counsellest. But that thou mayest not go forth without the reward that thou hast earned, I will order three hundred lashes to be given thee in my dungeon."

Chilo paled. The handsome face of Vinitius glowed with such stern determination that he could not hope the promised reward was merely a cruel jest. He cast himself on his knees. Bending himself almost double he moaned in a broken voice:

"Wherefore? Oh, King of Persia, wherefore?

Pyramid of mercy! Colossus of charity! Wherefore? I am old, hungry, wretched. I have done thee a service. Is this thy reward?"

"Such is the reward thou wouldst give to the Christians," cried Vinitius.

He called the overseer. Chilo fell prostrate at his feet, and, embracing them convulsively, cried, with deathly pallor in his face:

"Master, master! I am old. Fifty, not three hundred! Fifty are enough. A hundred, not three hundred! Mercy, mercy!"

Vinitius pushed him away with his foot, and gave the order. In the twinkle of an eye, two powerful Quadi appeared from behind the overseer. Seizing Chilo by the remnants of his hair, they wound his cloak around his head, and dragged him off to the dungeon.

"For the sake of Christ!" cried the Greek, as they reached the door of the corridor.

Vinitius was left alone. The order he had given raised his spirits. He strove to collect his scattered thoughts and reduce them to order. The victory he had gained over himself elated him. It seemed to him that he had made a long stride towards Lygia. Some great reward must follow. At the first moment it did not occur to him that he had been guilty of grievous injustice to Chilo in ordering him to be flogged for the very thing for which formerly he had rewarded him. As yet he was too much of a Roman to feel compunction for the pain of another, or to concern himself with what happened to a wretched Greek. Had he even thought of it, he would have considered he did right in punishing the caitiff. But his only thought was of Lygia. He imagined himself saying to her, "I will not return thee evil for good. When thou learnest what I have done to this man who would have persuaded me to raise a hand against thee, thou wilt be grateful." Then followed the thought, Would Lygia approve of his treatment of Chilo? Nay, her creed commanded forgiveness. Nay, the Christians forgave the scoundrel, though they had greater reason for revenge.

Then for the first time there rang through his soul the cry, "For the sake of Christ!" He remembered that with this cry Chilo had rescued himself from the hands of the Lygians. He resolved to remit the rest of the punishment.

He was on the point of summoning the overseer, when that individual appeared before him.

"Master," said the overseer, "the old man has fainted. He may be dead. Shall I allow him to be flogged further?"

"Revive him and bring him hither."

The overseer disappeared behind the curtain. But the revival could not have been easy. Vinitius waited for a long interval, and was growing impatient, when the slaves led in the Greek, and at a given signal retired.

Chilo was pale as a sheet. Down his legs and upon the Mosaic pavement trickled streams of blood. He was conscious, however. Throwing himself on his knees, he stretched out imploring hands.

"Thanks to thee, master," he cried. "Thou art great and merciful."

"Dog! Know that I forgave thee for the sake of that Christ, to whom I myself have owed my life."

"Master, I will serve Him and thee."

"Be silent and listen. Rise! Thou shalt accompany me to the house where Lygia dwells."

Chilo rose. But scarce had he stood on his feet, when he paled with a deadlier pallor, and moaned in a broken voice:

"Master, I am truly hungry. Fain would I go, master, but I am too weak. Let me have even the remnants from thy dog's plate, and I will go."

Vinitius ordered that he should have food, a piece of gold, and a cloak. Chilo, weakened by the lashes and by hunger, could not even totter after food. Terror struck him lest Vinitius might construe his weakness as obstinacy and order the flogging renewed.

"Give me wine to warm me," he cried, with chattering teeth, "and I will go to Greece itself."

In fact, after a time he recovered some of his strength, and Vinitius and he went out.

The road was long. Linus, like most Christians, lived in the Trans-Tiber, not far from Miriam's house. Finally Chilo indicated to Vinitius a small house standing apart, surrounded by an ivy-covered wall.

"This is the house, master," he said.

"Good!" said Vinitius. "And now go thy way. But first hearken to what I have to say. Forget that thou hast served me. Forget also where Miriam, Peter, and Glaucus are living. Forget also this house, forget the Christians. Every month thou mayest come to my house, where the freedman Demas will pay thee two pieces of gold. But if thou spyest further upon the Christians, I will order thee to be flogged to death, or will hand thee over to the prefect of the city."

Chilo bowed low and said:

"I will forget."

But when Vinitius had disappeared around the corner of the alley, he stretched out his threatening hands and cried:

"By Ates and Furies! I will not forget!"

And then again he collapsed.

CHAPTER XI

Vinitius went straight to Miriam's house. At the gate he met Nazarius, who started at sight of him. Vinitius gave him a cordial greeting, and asked to be led to his mother's house.

In the room besides Miriam he found Peter, Glaucus, Crispus, and Paul of Tarsus. The latter had recently returned from Fregellae. The sight of the young Tribune astonished every one.

"I greet ye in the name of Christ, whom ye honor," said Vinitius.

"Blessed be His name forever," was the reply.

"I know your virtues and have received your kindness. Therefore, I come as a friend."

"And we greet thee as a friend," returned Peter. "Sit down, master, and partake of our meal as a guest."

"I will sit down and eat with ye. But first give me a hearing, oh, Peter and Paul of Tarsus, so that ye may trust me. I know where Lygia is. I have come here from before the house of Linus, which is close to this dwelling. Caesar hath given me the right to possess her. I have nearly five hundred slaves in my house. I could surround her abode and carry her off. But I have not done this, and I will not do it."

"Then may the blessing of the Lord descend upon thee and purify thy heart," said Peter.

"I thank thee. But hearken further. I did not do so, though I live in a torment of longing. Before I came among ye, I would surely have carried her off and held her by force. But your virtue and your creed, though I profess it not, have made some great change in my soul, so that I dare not use force. I myself cannot comprehend it, but so it is. That is why I come to you, for ye stand to Lygia in the place of father and mother, and I say to ye, 'Give me Lygia for my wife, and I swear that not only will I allow her to confess Christ, but I myself will begin to learn His creed.' "

He held his head erect. His voice was firm. Nevertheless he was moved. His legs trembled beneath his striped mantle. When he noticed the hush that followed his words, he went on as if anticipating a refusal:

"I know the obstacles in the way. But I love her as my own eyes. Though I am not your enemy—neither yours nor Christ's—I wished to meet you truthfully, so that you may trust me. I am staking my whole life on this issue. But I tell you the truth. Some might say, 'Baptize me.' But I say, 'Give me light.' I believe in Christ's resurrection, for truthful witnesses have told me this who saw Him after death. I believe, for I have seen it, that your religion teaches virtue, justice and

charity, but not the crimes of which you are suspected. Still, I fail to understand it as a whole. Something I have learned from your works, something from Lygia, something from my discussions with you. I claim that a change hath been wrought within me. Once I ruled my servants with a rod of iron. I can do this no longer. I knew no mercy, now I know it. Once I loved pleasure. The other night I ran from it because it stifled me through very disgust. Once I believed in violence, now I renounce it. Know that I cannot recognize myself. I revolt at banquets, at songs, at cymbals, at garlands, at Caesar's court, at nude bodies, at every crime. When I think Lygia is pure as mountain snow, I love her all the more. When I think that she is such as she is through your creed, I love that creed and desire it. But since I do not fully comprehend it, since I know not if I can practice it, or if my nature will endure it, I live in uncertainty and torment, as though in some dark dungeon."

Here his brows knitted with pain. A glow appeared on his cheeks. He hurried on with greater emotion:

"You see, I am tortured with love and doubt. I have been told that in your creed there is room for life, for human joy, for happiness, for order, for government, for the Roman dominion. Is that so? I have been told that ye are mad. Tell me what do you aim at? Is it sin to love, is it sin to experience pleasure, is it sin to wish for happiness? Are ye enemies of life? Need a Christian be miserable? Should I renounce Lygia? What is your view of truth? Your acts and your words are as transparent water. But what lies at the bottom of that water? You see that I am sincere. Scatter away the darkness, for I have been told this, 'Greece created wisdom and beauty, Rome power.' But what have they brought forth? Therefore, tell me what would ye bring forth? If there is light beyond your doors, open them that I may see it."

"We bring forth charity," said Peter.

Paul of Tarsus added:

"If I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am as sounding brass."

Nevertheless, the heart of the old Apostle yearned to that soul in torment, which like a bird beating against its bars, strove toward the air and the sun. He stretched out his hand to Vinitius.

"Who so knocketh, to him shall be opened," he said. "The grace of the Lord is upon thee. Therefore, I bless thee, thy soul and thy love, in the name of the Saviour of the world."

Vinitius, who had already spoken with wild enthusiasm, sprang towards Peter. Then a strange thing happened. That descendant of the Quirites, who until recently had failed to recognize any common humanity in an alien, grasped the hands of the old Galilean and pressed them gratefully to his lips.

Peter was filled with joy. He saw that once more his seed had fallen on good soil, that his fishing net had gathered in another soul.

All present were no less rejoiced at this sign of homage to God's Apostle. With one voice they exclaimed:

"Glory to God in the highest!"

Vinitius arose with a radiant face.

"I see," he cried, "that happiness can dwell among ye, for I myself am happy. I know that you can convince me in all other things. But I will say more. This cannot happen in Rome. Caesar goes to Antium. I must accompany him, for he hath commanded it. You know that to refuse is death. But if I have found favor in your eyes, go with me and teach me your creed. You will be safer than I. In that vast concourse of people you will find opportunity to proclaim the truth in the very court of Caesar. Actea, they say, is a Christian. Among the pretorians are many Christians, for I myself have seen soldiers kneeling before thee, oh, Peter, at the Nomentan gate. I have a villa at Antium, where we may assemble at the very side of Caesar to listen to your teachings. Glaucus hath said that for the sake of a single soul ye are willing to travel to the ends of the world. Do then

for me what ye have done for those who attracted you hither from Judea. Do so and abandon not my soul."

Hearing this, they held counsel among themselves. With joy they thought of the victory of their creed, and of the importance to the heathen world of the conversion of an Augustale, the scion of one of the oldest families in Rome. It was true that they would have wandered to the ends of the world for the sake of a single soul. Since the death of the Master they had done nothing else. Therefore, a refusal was the furthest thing from their thoughts. But Peter was at that time the pastor of a great multitude. Hence, he could not go. Paul of Tarsus, however, who had recently been in Aricium and in Fregellae, and who was preparing for another long journey into the Orient to visit the churches and inspire them with new zeal, consented to accompany the young Tribune to Antium, where he might readily find a vessel bound for the Grecian seas.

Vinitius regretted that Peter, to whom he owed so much, could not accompany him, but he thanked Paul heartily. Then he turned to the old Apostle with a final request.

"Knowing Lygia's dwelling," he said, "I might myself go there and ask, as is only meet, whether she would accept me as a husband if my soul turned to Christ. But I prefer to ask thee, oh, Apostle! Let me see her, or lead me to her. I know not how long I shall remain in Antium. Remember, that by Caesar's side no one is sure of the morrow. Petronius himself has already assured me that there might be danger there for me. Let me see her ere I go. Let me feast my eyes upon her. Let me ask her to forget the evil I have done, and help me to a better life."

Peter the Apostle smiled kindly and said:

"My son, who would deny thee a just joy?"

Vinitius again bowed low over his hand. He could not suppress the joy that flooded his heart. The Apostle took his head between his hands.

"Be not afraid of Caesar," he said. "I tell thee no hair on thy head will be harmed."

Then he sent Miriam for Lygia, but bade her not reveal whom she would find among them, so that her joy might be the greater.

It was not far. In a little while they assembled in the chamber and saw Miriam leading Lygia by the hand through the myrtles in the garden.

Vinitius would have fain run out to greet her. But at sight of that beloved figure, happiness deprived him of his strength. He stood breathless, with throbbing heart, barely able to hold himself on his feet. He was a hundred times more moved than when for the first time in his life he had heard the shafts of the Parthians whizzing around his head.

She ran in unsuspecting. At sight of him she stopped, as if rooted to the spot. Her face flushed and then paled. Her eyes glanced around her with alarm and surprise.

But only bright and kindly eyes met hers. Peter approached and asked:

"Lygia, dost thou still love him?"

There was a sudden hush. Her lips trembled as those of a child who is on the point of bursting into tears, because it fears its guilt, but cannot help confessing it.

"Answer," said the Apostle.

Then with humility and fear in her voice, she whispered: slowly falling to the feet of Peter:

"I do."

Vinitius at the same moment knelt beside her. Peter placed his hands on their heads and said, "Love each other in the Lord, and for His glory, for there is no sin in your love."

CHAPTER XII

Walking in the garden, Vinitius poured out to Lygia in burning words all that he had previously confessed

to the Apostle—the unrest of his soul, the change he had undergone, and all that infinite longing which had haunted him since he had left Miriam's house. He owned that he had tried to forget her, but could not. Days and nights had he thought of her. That little cross of boxwood branches which she had left for him, and which he had deposited in his sanctuary, to be adored against his will as something sacred, had been a constant reminder of her. And the longing had increased with every moment, for love was stronger than he, and had possessed his soul, even from his first sight of her at the house of the Auli.

The Fates spun the thread of life for others, but for him love and melancholy had spun it. His very evil actions had their origin in love. He had loved her at the Auli's and on the Palatine, he had loved her when he saw her at Ostranium listening to Peter, when with Croto's help he had sought to carry her off, when she had watched at his bedside, and when she had fled from him. Then Chilo came with the news that he had discovered her abode, and suggested that he once more try to carry her off; but he preferred to punish Chilo and seek the Apostles to ask them for light and for Lygia. Blessed be the moment when he entertained the thought, for now he was by her side, and no more would she flee from him as she had fled from the house of Miriam.

"I did not flee from thee," said Lygia.

"Then why didst thou leave me?"

She lifted her blue eyes to his, then bowed her blushing face and murmured:

"Thou knowest."

Vinitius was silent from very excess of joy. Then he sought to explain to her how his eyes had slowly opened to the fact that she was entirely different from Roman women, save only Pomponia. Yet he could not express this fully, for he could not define his own feelings, that in her person a new strange beauty had entered the world, a beauty that was not a mere statue,

but a soul. He told enough to fill her with happiness, for he made her understand that he loved her for the very reason that she had fled from him, and that she would be sacred to him at his hearthstone. He seized her hand. He could speak no further. He could only gaze upon her in ecstasy as upon the recovered joy of his life, and repeat her name as if to assure himself that he had again found her and that she was by his side.

"Oh, Lygia! oh, Lygia!"

At last he fell to inquiring of her all that had gone on in her soul. She confessed that she had loved him from the time she had first met him at the Auli, and that if he had restored her to them on the Palatine, she would have confessed that love and striven to soften their anger against him.

"I swear to thee," said Vinitius, "that it never entered my mind to take thee from the Auli. Petronius will sometime assure thee that even then I informed him that I loved thee and wished to marry thee. 'Let her anoint my door with wolf-grease,' I said to him, 'and take her seat at my hearth.' But he laughed at me and suggested to Caesar that he demand thee as a hostage and hand thee over to me. Often have I cursed him in my anguish, but it may have been a favoring star which ordained it thus, for otherwise I should never have known the Christians, nor understood thee."

"Believe me, Marcus," answered Lygia, "it was Christ who so ordained it to lead thee to Himself."

Vinitius lifted his head in some astonishment.

"'Tis true," he said, brightly. "For all things worked themselves out so strangely that in seeking thee I found the Christians. In Ostranium I listened thunderstruck to the Apostle. Never had I heard such words before. And thou wert praying for me?"

"Yes."

They passed the ivy-covered arbor, approaching the spot where Ursus, after strangling Croto, had fallen upon Vinitius.

"Here I should have perished but for thee," said the young man.

"Forget all that, and never recall it to Ursus."

"Could I seek vengeance on him for his defense of thee? Were he a slave I would free him forthwith."

"Had he been a slave the Auli would long since have freed him."

"Rememberest thou," continued Vinitius, "that I would have restored thee to the Auli? But thou didst fear that Caesar might hear of it and wreak his vengeance on the Auli. Take thought of this, that now thou mayest see them as often as thou wishest."

"How, Marcus?"

"I say now, for I think that thou mayest without danger see them when thou art mine. Yea, for when Caesar learns of thy visits and asks what I have done with the hostage he entrusted me, I will answer him. 'She is my wife, and visits the Auli at my wish.' His stay in Antium will be short, for he wishes to go to Achaia. But even should he remain longer, I shall not have to call on him every day. After Paul of Tarsus has completed his instructions in your creed, I shall receive baptism, and shall return here and receive the friendship of the Auli. There will be no further obstacles in our way. I will set thee by my hearth, oh, dearest! dearest!"

He raised his hand heavenwards as if to make God a witness to his love. Lygia, lifting her shining eyes to him, said:

"And then I shall say, where thou art, Caius, there am I, Caia."

"No, Lygia! I swear that never was woman so honored in her husband's home as thou shalt be in mine."

They walked in silence, as though unable to realize fully their own happiness. In their deep love, they seemed a pair of gods, as beautiful as though Spring had brought them forth into the world with the flowers.

At length they stood under the cypress growing by the door of the dwelling. Lygia leaned against its trunk. Vinitius implored her with a trembling voice.

"Tell Ursus to go to the Auli's home, and bring therefrom thy belongings and thy childhood's toys."

Blushing like a rose, or like the dawn, she replied:

"Custom dictates otherwise."

"I know that. It is customary for a matron to bear these behind a bride, but do thou this for me. I will take them with me to my villa in Antium, and they will serve as constant reminders of thee."

Here he clasped his hands together, and, with the manner of a child begging for something, repeated:

"Pomponia will soon return. Therefore do this, my divinity, do this, my best beloved."

"Let Pomponia do as she wishes," said Lygia, blushing still further at the mention of a bridal ceremony.

Again they were silent. Love deprived them of utterance. Lygia still leaned against the cypress, her face whitening in the shadow like a flower, her eyes downcast, her breast heaving more rapidly. Vinitius's face changed. A pallor overspread it. In the noonday stillness they heard the throbbing of their own hearts, and in their mental ecstasy the cypress, the myrtle bushes, and the ivy of the arbor were strangely transformed as though this were the garden of love.

Miriam, standing in the threshold, awoke them by her call to the midday meal. The pair sat down with the Apostles, who gazed on them with joy, as representatives of the young generation which, after their death, should preserve and spread still further the seeds of the new religion. Peter broke and blessed the bread. Peace shone in every face. A great happiness seemed to pervade the whole room.

"See," said Paul, turning to Vinitius, "are we enemies of love and joy?"

"I know the truth now. For never have I been so happy as I have been with you."

CHAPTER XIII

Returning home through the Forum, on the evening of that day, Vinitius perceived at the entrance to the Tuscus quarter the gilded litter of Petronius, borne by eight Bithynians. He halted it by a signal of his hand, and approached the curtains.

"May thy dreams be pleasant," he exclaimed, with a laugh at sight of Petronius asleep.

"Oh, it is thou?" cried Petronius awaking. "True, I had just dropped into a dream, for I have spent the night at the Palatine. I merely came to purchase something to read at Antium. What is the news?"

"Art thou shopping in the book stores?" asked Vinitius.

"Yes. I wish to leave no disorder in my library, so I am providing myself with a special supply for the journey. Some new works of Musonius and of Seneca may have come out. I am seeking also for Persius, and a certain edition of Vergil's Eclogues which I do not at present possess. Oh, how weary I am! How my hands ache from unrolling parchments. When one is in a book store he is seized by curiosity to examine this and that. I have been to the shops of Avirnus and of Atractus on the Argiletum, and before that I visited the Sozii in the Sandalarius quarter. By Castor! How sleepy I am."

"Thou wert on the Palatine? Then I must ask thee what is the news. Or, dost thou know? Here, send thy litter home with the books, and come to my house. We will talk of Antium or other things."

" 'Tis well," said Petronius, emerging from the litter. "Thou must know that the day after to-morrow we set out for Antium."

"How could I know that?"

"In what world art thou living? I see I shall be the

first to bring thee news. Yes, hold thyself in readiness for the morning of the day after to-morrow. Peas with olive-oil have been of no avail, a cloth on the back of the neck has been of no avail. Bronzebeard has grown hoarse. So delay is no longer to be thought of. He curses Rome and its air, by the foundations of the world. Gladly would he raze the city to the ground or destroy it with fire. He longs for the sea as speedily as possible. He says that the stenches which the wind blows from the narrow alleys will drive him into the grave. To-day huge sacrifices were offered up in all the temples for the restoration of his voice. Woe to Rome, and especially to the Senate, if the gods do not grant this soon."

"Then wherefore should he go to Achaea?"

"But doth our god-like Caesar possess only one talent?" laughed Petronius. "He would fain exhibit himself in the Olympic games, as a poet with his verses on the burning of Troy, as a charioteer, as a musician, as an athlete,—nay, even as a dancer, and in every rôle he will win all the garlands that have been bound for the victors. Knowest thou why that ape grew hoarse? Because yesterday the envy seized him to rival our Paris in dancing, and he danced for us the adventures of Leda. He perspired too freely and caught cold. He was as wet and slimy as an eel just taken from the water. He changed masks one after another. He spun around like a spindle. He tossed his arms like a drunken sailor. It made me sick to gaze on that big belly and those thin legs. Paris had taught him for two weeks. But picture to thyself Bronzebeard as Leda, or as the God-swan. That was a swan indeed! Now he wants to come out in public with this pantomime, first in Antium and afterwards in Rome."

"People have already been shocked by his singing in public. But a Roman emperor coming out as a mime! No, that at least Rome will not bear."

"My beloved friend, Rome will bear anything. The Senate will even pass a vote of thanks to the Father of

his country." Then he added: "And the mob will be proud that Caesar is its mountebank."

"Tell me," cried Vinitius, "can anything be more debased?"

Petronius shrugged his shoulders. "Thou hast buried thyself in thine own home with thy thoughts of Lygia and of the Christians. Hence thou hast not heard what happened two days ago. Nero publicly married Pythagoras. Nero was the bride. Does not that seem that the full measure of madness has been surpassed? The priests were invited and they came, and solemnly performed the ceremony. I was present. I can stand a good deal, but I confess that I thought that the gods, if they exist, should have given a sign. But Caesar believes not in the gods, and he is right."

"So, in one and the same person, he is the High Priest, a god, and an atheist."

Petronius laughed. "True, that thought did not occur to me. 'Tis a combination never yet seen in the world. But it must be added that this High Priest, who does not believe in the gods, and this god who jests at gods, is afraid of them in his quality of atheist."

"That is proved by what happened in the temple of Vesta."

"What a world!"

"As the world is, so is Caesar. But this cannot last long."

They had now entered the house of Vinitius. The latter cheerily called for supper. Then he turned to Petronius.

"No, my beloved," he said, "the world must be regenerated."

"We at least will not regenerate it, if but for this reason, that man, in these days of Nero, is but a butterfly—he lives in the sunshine of favor, and perishes at the first breath of cold, even against his will. By the son of Maia, more than once have I asked myself: By what marvel has Lucius Saturninus, for example, been able to reach

the age of ninety-three, and outlive Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius? But let that go. Wilt thou not send thy litter for Eunice? My desire for sleep has passed away. Let the lyrists appear at the supper. Afterwards we will converse about Antium. It is necessary to think of it, especially for thee."

Vinitius sent for Eunice. But he declared that he would not bother his head about the Antium matter.

"Let those bother themselves who know no other way of living than in the sunshine of Caesar's favor. The world does not end on the Palatine, especially for such as have something else to occupy heart and soul."

He spoke with such indifference, yet so cheerily and vivaciously that Petronius was struck. Staring at his nephew he said:

"What has happened to thee? To-day thou art as one who wears a golden boss around his neck."

"I am happy," said Vinitius. "I invited thee here in order to tell thee so."

"What has happened?"

"Something which I would not exchange for the Roman Empire."

He seated himself. Throwing his arm around the back of the chair, and leaning his head on his arm, he spoke with a face wreathed in smiles, and a bright light in his eyes.

"Dost thou remember when we were together at the house of Aulus Plautius, and when for the first time thou didst see the divine maiden whom thou thyself did call the morning star and the Spring? Dost thou remember that Psyche, that incomparable one, the most beautiful among virgins and among all your goddesses?"

Petronius stared at him, wondering if the youth's wits had forsaken him.

"How thou dost run on!" he said at last. "Of course I remember Lygia."

"I am her betrothed," said Vinitius.

"What?"

Vinitius sprang up and called his overseer.

"Summon the slaves to the last soul, and be quick about it."

"Art thou her betrothed?" repeated Petronius.

But before he had recovered himself the great hall of Vinitius swarmed with men and women. Panting old men ran in together with men in the prime of life, women, boys, and girls. More were seeking to push their way in. In the corridors were heard voices calling in many languages. At length all formed themselves in rows along the walls and among the columns. Vinitius, standing by the fountain, turned to his freedman Demas with the order:

"All who have served twenty years in this house will present themselves to-morrow before the praetor, where they will obtain their freedom. All who have not served so long will each receive three pieces of gold, and double rations during the week. Send orders to the dungeons in my villas that all punishments be remitted, that the shackles be stricken from all prisoners, and that every one be sufficiently fed. Know that this is a happy day for me, and I wish joy to pervade the house."

For a moment the slaves stood in awed silence. They could hardly believe their own ears. Then all hands were uplifted simultaneously and a cry went up from all lips:

"Ah, master! Ah—ah—ah!"

Vinitius waved them away with his hand. Though they would fain have fallen at his feet to thank him, they hurried away at the signal, and filled the house from basement to roof with their joyous voices.

"To-morrow," said Vinitius, "I will summon them all into the garden, where they will draw such figures as they choose in the ground. Those who draw a fish will receive their freedom at the hands of Lygia."

Petronius who was never affected permanently by anything, now asked indifferently:

"A fish? Ah, yes! I remember Chilo told us it is a Christian symbol." He stretched out his hand to Vini-

tius. "Happiness always exists wherever a man sees it. May Flora strew flowers before thy feet for long years. I wish thee all thou couldst wish thyself."

"I thank thee for those wishes. I had feared that thou wouldst seek to dissuade me, and that, as thou seest, would be merely to lose time."

"I dissuade thee? Not in the least. On the contrary I tell thee thou are right."

"Ah, turncoat!" cried Vinitius, joyously, "hast thou forgotten what thou didst say to me when we were returning from Pomponia's house?"

Petronius answered coldly, "I do not. But I have changed my opinion." Then he added: "My beloved friend, everything changes in Rome. Husbands change wives. Wives change husbands. Why may I not change my opinion? It was a mere accident that Nero did not marry Actea, for whom a royal lineage was invented for the purpose. And why not? He would have had an honest wife, we an honest Augusta. By Proteus and his barren wastes in the sea! I shall change my opinion as often as I find it right or convenient. As to Lygia, doubtless her lineage is more certainly royal than that of Actea. But when thou art in Antium, have a care for Poppaea, who is ruthless in her revenges."

"I fear nothing. Not a hair of my head will be injured in Antium."

"If thou seekest to astonish me once more, thou art mistaken. But whence comes thy certainty?"

"The Apostle Peter assured me so."

"Ah! the Apostle assured thee! There is no arguing against that. But at least let me take certain precautions, if only for the purpose of preventing the Apostle Peter from proving a false prophet, for should the Apostle Peter, by some mischance be mistaken, he might lose thy confidence, and thy confidence might be useful to the Apostle Peter in the future."

"Do as thou wilst, but I confide in him. If thou imaginest that thou wilt sway me by scoffing repetitions of his name, thou art mistaken."

"Well, one more question. Hast thou become a Christian?"

"Not yet. But Paul of Tarsus accompanies me, to expound the teachings of Christ. In the end I shall be baptized. I do not accept what thou sayest that these teachings are enemies of life and happiness."

"So much the better for thee and for Lygia," returned Petronius. Then shrugging his shoulders, he added, as though to himself, "'Tis marvellous, how clever these people are in making proselytes, and how their sect is spreading."

"Yea," replied Vinitius, with as much ardor as if he had been baptized. "There are thousands and tens of thousands in Rome, in other Italian cities, in Greece and in Asia. There are Christians in the legions and among the pretorians, and in the very palace of Caesar. Slaves and citizens profess the creed, poor and rich, plebeian and patrician. Knowest thou that some of the Cornelii are Christians, that Pomponia Graecina is a Christian, that Actea is one? Yes, it is a creed that wins the world. It is the only thing that can regenerate it. Shrug not thy shoulders, for who knows but that in a month or a year thou also mayest not accept it."

"I?" said Petronius. "No, by the son of Lethe, I will not, not even if it contains all human and divine truth and wisdom. It would involve trouble, and I hate trouble. It would require self-denial, and I would not deny myself anything in life. In a nature like thine, which resembles boiling water over a fire, something of this sort might be expected. But I have my gems, my cameos, my vases, and my Eunice. I have no belief in Olympus, but I make one of my own on this earth. I will blossom until the shafts of the divine archer pierce me, or until Caesar orders me to open my veins. I am too fond of the odor of violets, and the comforts of the dining-room. I even have a fondness for our gods, as rhetorical figures, and for Achaia, whither I am now about to set out with our burly, thin-legged, incomparable, god-like Caesar, the August, the Ever-

Victorious, the Hercules of our time—Nero himself."

He grew hilarious at the very idea that it would be possible for him to accept the teachings of the Galilean fishermen, and hummed to himself:

> With the green of the myrtle I circle my sword
> Like Harmodius and Aristogiton

He stopped short, for Eunice's arrival was now announced. This was the signal for supper. The musicians poured out harmony from their lyres.

Vinitius now told of Chilo's visit, and how it had resulted in his going directly to the Apostles. He explained how the suggestion had arisen while Chilo was being flogged.

Petronius, who had grown drowsy again, woke up at this, and said:

"The suggestion was a good one, if the result be good. As to Chilo, I should have given him five pieces of gold. But if thy choice were to flog him, it were best that thou shouldst have flogged him to death, for who knows whether the time may not come when the Senators will bow before him as now they bow before our cobbler-knight, Vatinius. Good-night."

And removing his garland, he and Eunice made their preparations for departure. When they had gone, Vinitius went up into the library and wrote the following to Lygia:

Would that when thou openest thy beautiful eyes, oh divinity, this letter might say to thee Good-morning. It is with this hope I write, though I will see thee to-morrow. Caesar goes to Antium the day after to-morrow, and I, alas! must accompany him. Have I not explained to thee that a refusal would imperil my life? And, at present, I have no courage for death. But if thou wishest that I should not go, write me only a word and I will remain. 'Twill be for Petronius to avert my peril. To-day, the day of joy, I scattered guerdons among all my slaves. Those who had served twenty years in my house I will lead to-morrow to the praetor,

to give them their freedom. Thou, oh beloved, must commend me for this, because it seems to me that this will be conformable to that kindly creed which thou professest, and also because I have done this for thy sake. I shall tell them to-morrow that they owe their freedom to thee, so that they may know whom to thank, and may praise thy name. I yield myself up to the bondage of joy and of thee. May I never know freedom. May Antium be cursed, together with Bronzebeard's journey. Thrice and four times happy am I that I am not as wise as Petronius, for then I should certainly be obliged to go to Achaia. Meanwhile the memory of thee will sweeten the separation. Whenever it is possible for me to leave, I will leap on a horse and hurry to Rome, to feast my eyes upon thy face, and my ears upon thy voice. When it is impossible, I will send thee a slave with a letter of inquiry about thee. I greet thee, oh my divinity, and embrace thy feet. Be not angry that I call thee a divinity. If thou forbid, I will obey, but today I can do not otherwise. From thy future house I greet thee with my whole soul.

CHAPTER XIV

It was known in Rome that, on his way, Caesar would stop at Ostium to see the largest ship in the world, which had recently brought wheat from Alexandria. Thence he would go to Antium by the shore road. The orders had already been given. At the Ostian Gate, therefore, there assembled at early morn a great multitude, consisting of the Roman rabble, and of all the nations of the world, come to feast their eyes with the sight of Caesar's retinue, of which the populace could never get their fill. The road to Antium was neither long nor difficult. Antium itself was filled with palaces and villas sumptuously equipped. One could find there everything required for comfort, or the most exquisite luxury of the time. It was Caesar's custom, however, to take

with him all the things in which he delighted, from musical instruments and artistic furniture to the statues and mosaics which he would arrange in order even where he stopped but a short while, either for rest or bodily refreshment. Therefore, multitudes of servants accompanied him on every journey, as well as detachments of pretorians and Augustales, each of whom had his individual following of slaves.

At early dawn of that day shepherds from the Campania, their legs swathed with goat-skins, their faces sunburnt, drove five hundred she-asses through the gates, so that Poppaea might have her customary bath in their milk on the morrow at Antium. The mob found a hilarious delight in watching the long ears swaying amid clouds of dust, and in listening to the whistle of the whips and the wild cries of the shepherds. When the she-asses had passed, crowds of boys rushed out upon the roadway, swept it clean and strewed it with flowers and pine-needles. Word ran through the crowd, and swelled it with a sense of local pride, that the entire road to Antium would be covered with flowers plucked from private gardens in the neighborhood, or purchased at high prices from women dealers at the Mugionis Gate. With the passing of the morning hours the crowds grew greater. Many had brought their entire families, and, to temper the tedium of waiting, they spread provisions on stones intended for the new temple of Ceres, and ate their noonday meals under the glowing sun. Groups gathered here and there, the presiding genius in each of which was some travelled personage who could talk learnedly of Caesar's present journey, his past journeys, and of travelling in general. Sailors and veterans told strange tales which they had heard during foreign campaigns about countries where Roman foot had never been planted. Townspeople who had never gone beyond the Appian Way, listened open-mouthed to the marvels related of India; of Arabia and of archipelagoes surrounding Britain, where Briareus had chained the sleeping Saturn on a certain ghost-haunted island; of northern

seas whose waters were of jelly-like consistency; and of the hissing and roaring which the ocean emitted when the setting sun descended into its waters. Such stories found ready faith among the rabble as they had already found faith even with such men as Pliny and Tacitus. They spoke also of that ship which Caesar was to stop to gaze at, a ship which had brought grain enough for two years, besides four hundred passengers, the same number in the crew, and a multitude of wild animals which were to be sacrificed at the summer games. These stories created a general good will towards Caesar, who not only fed his people, but amused them. Everybody prepared to give him an enthusiastic greeting.

A detachment of Numidian horsemen, belonging to the pretorian guard, were the first to arrive. Their uniforms were yellow, girt at the waist with crimson. In their ears were huge earrings which reflected a golden gleam upon their burnished black faces. The points of their bamboo lances shone in the sun like flames. After them came a brilliant procession. The multitude pressed forward to catch a closer glimpse. But a detachment of pretorian infantry lined both sides of the road from the gateway, so as to crush them back. There moved by wagons bearing tents of purple, red and violet, snowy white tents of muslin, interwoven with golden threads, oriental carpets, tables of lemon-wood, pieces of mosaic, kitchen utensils, and cages with birds from the East, South and West, whose brains and tongues were destined for Caesar's table, vessels of wine and baskets of fruit. Such objects as might be bruised or broken in the wagons were borne by slaves on foot. Hence there were hundreds of men carrying vessels and statuettes of Corinthian bronze. To special bands of slaves were assigned Etruscan or Grecian vases, to others golden or silver vessels, or goblets of Alexandrian crystal. Each band was separated from the next one by a detachment of pretorians either on horseback or on foot, and each had overseers armed with whips whose lashes ended in lumps of lead or iron. The procession, consisting of

men bearing all these different objects with intense care and pre-occupation, took on the aspect of a solemn religious function, and the resemblance grew still more vivid when the musical instruments of Caesar and his court followed. Harps, Grecian lutes, lyres, formingas, cithers, flutes, long twisted horn trumpets and cymbals, passed by in bewildering profusion.

That sea of instruments with all the gold, bronze, precious stones and mother-of-pearl gleaming in the sun might have given the impression that Apollo or Bacchus was journeying through the world. Lordly chariots followed. These were filled with acrobats, with dancers, male and female, artistically grouped and holding wands in their hands. Then came slaves devoted not to service, but to shameful uses, children, male and female, selected throughout Greece and Asia Minor, with long tresses or curly hair gathered in golden nets, whose lovely faces resembling Cupids, were thickly overlaid with cosmetics, so that their delicate complexions might not to be tanned by the winds of the Campania.

And now came a pretorian detachment of gigantic Sicambrians, bearded, with red and flaxen hair, and blue eyes. Roman eagles were borne in front of them, together with inscribed tablets, statues of German and Roman gods, and finally statues and busts of Caesar. From beneath the skins and armor of these soldiers appeared arms and shoulders, sunburnt and massive, like machines of war fit to wield the mighty weapons which they bore. The earth seemed to yield beneath their measured and heavy tread. Conscious of the strength which, if need be, they could turn against Caesar's self, they glanced contemptuously on the rabble in the street, evidently forgetting that many of them had come to the city in chains. But there was only a small handful of these men, for the main body of the pretorians remained encamped to watch over the city and preserve order there. When they had passed there were led by the lions and tigers which Nero had ordered to be trained so that if at any moment the temptation should seize him to imitate Bacchus, he might

attach them to his chariots. Arabs and Hindoos led them in chains of steel, so fully concealed by encircling flowers, that it seemed as though the animals were led in garlands of flowers. Tamed by skillful trainers, they gazed at the crowd through green and sleepy eyes, but from time to time they lifted their giant heads and sniffed up through wheezing nostrils the exhalations of the surrounding humanity, licking their chops the while with rasping tongues.

Now came Caesar's chariots and litters, large and small, gold or purple, inlaid with ivory, pearls, or sparkling with precious stones; then another small detachment of pretorians in Roman armor, consisting entirely of Italian volunteers; then crowds of gorgeously clad servants and lads.

And at the last came Caesar himself. His approach was heralded from afar by multitudinous shouts.

In the crowd was Peter the Apostle. Once in his lifetime he wished to catch a sight of Caesar. He was accompanied by Lygia, her face covered by a thick veil, and by Ursus, whose strength afforded the surest protection for the young girl in the midst of that disorderly and dissolute crowd. The Lygian seized a stone destined for the temple, and brought it to the Apostle, so that by ascending it he could see better than the others.

The crowd murmured at first when Ursus pushed it apart, as a ship cleaves through the waves, but when they noticed the size of the stone, which four of the strongest athletes could not have lifted, murmurs were changed into shouts of wonder.

"Look! look!" resounded from all sides. But now Caesar had appeared. He sat in a tent-like chariot drawn by six white Idumean stallions shod with gold. The sides of the tent were purposely left open, so that the crowds could see Caesar. Others might have found place in the chariot, but Nero, wishing to centre all attention upon himself, passed through the streets alone, save for two deformed dwarfs lying at his feet. He was clad in a white tunic, and a toga of the color of amethyst, which

cast a bluish tint upon his face. A laurel wreath was on his head. His body had grown considerably in bulk since his departure from Naples. His face had widened. Beneath his lower jaw hung a double chin, so that his mouth, always too close to his nose, now seemed almost as if glued to that feature. His thick neck, as usual, was covered by a silk kerchief. This he arranged from time to time with a fat, white hand, whose overgrowing red hair looked almost like gory spots. Yet he would never allow the hair to be plucked by the manicures, because he was told that trembling of the hand would ensue with consequent detriment to his lute-playing. Infinite vanity, as always, was depicted on his face, tempered by weariness and suffering. It was the face at once of a tyrant and a mountebank. He turned his head from one side to the other, blinked his eyes, and listened intently to the greetings of the crowd.

A storm of shouts and applause came first. "Hail, godlike Caesar! Hail Emperor! Hail Conqueror, Peerless One, Son of Apollo, Apollo himself!"

At these words he smiled. But occasionally a scowl flitted across his face. The Roman rabble, fond of jesting and confident in their own numbers, always took their fill of sarcasms, even against the triumphal heroes, whom they loved and honored. It was known that at one of Julius Caesar's entrances into Rome, they had shouted, "Citizens, hide your wives, the baldheaded libertine is approaching."

Nero's overweening vanity could not brook the least jesting or criticism. Yet with the shouts of applause mingled cries of "Bronzebeard! what hast thou done with thy flaming beard? Art thou afraid that it would set fire to Rome?" Men who so shouted little knew what a prophecy lay hidden in their jest. Caesar was not much disturbed by their cries as he no longer wore a beard. He had sacrificed it some years ago to place it in a golden cylinder and dedicate it to the Jupiter in the Capitol. But there were others in the mob, who, hidden behind heaps of stones and the corners of temples, shouted,

"Matricide! Nero! Orestes! Alcmaeon!" and others still, "Where is Octavia?" "Yield up thy purple!"

Poppaea, who followed immediately after him, attracted howls of "Yellow-Hair!" a nickname which was applied to public prostitutes. Nero's trained ear caught all these various exclamations. He lifted his polished emerald to his eye as though wishing to discover and remember the speakers.

In this act, his glance rested upon the Apostle Peter, standing on the stone.

The two men looked at each other. Nobody in all that splendid retinue, nor in all those innumerable crowds, could have imagined that two powers of the earth were confronting each other, one of which would soon pass away like a bloody dream, while the other, the old man in coarse cloth, would seize in eternal possession the city and the world.

And now Caesar had passed. Poppaea, whom the people loathed, followed him in a sumptuous litter borne by eight Africans. Arrayed, as Nero was arrayed, in robes of the color of amethyst, with a thick layer of cosmetics on her face, motionless, pensive, indifferent, she looked like an evil yet beautiful goddess carried in the procession. A whole court of servants, male and female, followed and then a line of wagons filled with articles for the toilet and for general domestic use. The sun had already passed the noonday hour, when the procession of the Augustales began—a brilliant, gleaming, endless line, drawn out like a serpent. The indolent Petronius, saluted with kindly indulgence by the crowd, was carried in a litter with his godlike slave. Tigellinus drove in a chariot drawn by ponies adorned with white and purple feathers. He rose repeatedly from his chariot, and stretched his neck to see if Caesar were yet ready to give him the longed-for signal to take a seat in the imperial tent. Among the others, Licinianus Piso was greeted with applause, Vitelius with laughter, Vatinius with contemptuous whistling. Towards the consuls, Licinius and Lecanius, the crowd behaved with indifference, but Tul-

lius Senecio, whom for some unknown reason they loved, and Vestinus got their plaudits.

The court was innumerable. It seemed as if all that was wealthiest, most brilliant and most illustrious in Rome were migrating to Antium. Nero never travelled save with thousands of chariots. His following always surpassed a legion in numbers, and a legion in his day rarely fell below twelve hundred men. Hence the crowd could point to Domitius Afer, and the decrepit Lucius Saturninus and Vespasian, who had not yet gone on his campaign against Judea (whence he returned to receive Caesar's crown), and his sons, and Lucan and Annius Gallo, and Quintianus, and a multitude of women renowned for wealth, beauty, luxury, and debauchery.

The eyes of the multitude turned from these familiar faces to the harness, the chariots, the horses, the strange equipments of the servants, selected from all the nations of the world. In that flood of splendor and power one hardly knew what to look at. Not only the eye but the mind was dazzled by the gleaming of gold, purple and violet, by the sparkling of precious stones and the glitter of brocade, mother-of-pearl and ivory. It seemed that the very sunbeams had been absorbed into that abyss of splendor, and though there were not lacking wretched beings in the crowd, with sunken stomachs and with hunger-smitten eyes, the spectacle not only inflamed their envy and their greed, but filled them also with delight and pride, as a manifestation of the power and invincibility of Rome, to which the world contributed and before which it knelt. For who at that time would have ventured to doubt that that power would endure for all ages and would outlast all nations, or that in the whole world there was nothing which could resist it?

Vinitius, in the rear of the procession caught sight of the Apostle and Lygia. Leaping from his chariot, he was at their side, greeting them with beaming face. He spoke hurriedly, as one who has no time to lose:

"Thou hast come. I know not how to thank thee, oh, Lygia! God could not have sent me a better omen. I

salute thee, even while bidding thee farewell, but the farewell is not for long. I shall place relays of Parthian horses along the way, and every free day I shall be by thy side, until I get leave to return. Farewell!"

"Farewell, Marcus!" cried Lygia. In an undertone she added, "May Christ lead thee, and open thy soul to the teachings of Paul."

Overjoyed that she took thought for his speedy conversion, he replied:

"Be it as thou sayest! Paul prefers to travel with my men, but he is with me, and will be my comrade and my teacher. Lift thy veil, my beloved, that I may see thee once more before my journey. Why art thou so thickly veiled?"

She lifted her veil. Her bright face and marvellously smiling eyes were turned full upon him.

"Dost thou not like the veil?" she asked.

There was a slight savor of girlish pertness in her smile. Vinitius was delighted.

"'Tis bad for my eyes," he said. "They would gaze on thee forever until death. Ursus!" he added, turning to the Lygian, "watch her as the pupil of thine eye, for she is my mistress as well as thine."

He seized the girl's hand and pressed it to his lips. The bystanders were amazed. They could not understand such signs of honor from a resplendent Augustale to a maiden clad in a simple dress, almost that of a slave.

"Farewell."

He departed quickly to catch up with the now disappearing rear of the procession. The Apostle Paul made an unnoticed sign of the cross after him. The good Ursus poured out praises upon him, glad to see his young mistress listening with pleasure, and beaming gratitude upon him.

The retinue moved on, occasionally disappearing in clouds of golden dust. They gazed long after it, however, until Demas the miller approached, the same who employed Ursus in nightly toil. After kissing the hand of the Apostle, he pressed them to break bread with him,

explaining that his house was near the Emporium.

"You must be hungry and weary," he said, "after spending the greater part of the day at the gate."

They went with him. They ate and rested at his house. In the evening they returned to the Trans-Tiber, with the intention of crossing the Aemilian bridge which cut through it, passed over the Publicus Mount, going over the Aventine, between the temples of Diana and Mercury. The Apostle Peter gazed from this height upon the buildings surrounding him and on the others vanishing far away in the gloom. Silently he pondered over the power and the immensity of this city, to which he had come to preach the word of God. Up to this time he had seen the Roman legions and governors in the many lands through which he had wandered, but they were merely separate members of this power, which to-day for the first time he had seen summed up in the person of Nero.

That city, enormous, predatory, dissolute, rotten to the marrow of its bones, unassailable in its superhuman power; Caesar, himself, fratricide, matricide, uxoricide, followed by a retinue of bloody ghosts, no less in number than his court, debauchee and mountebank, who was yet the lord of thirty legions, and through them the whole earth; the courtiers covered with gold and purple, uncertain of the morrow, but to-day more powerful than kings—all these things together seemed to him to make up a hellish kingdom of injustice and depravity. His simple heart marvelled how God could bestow such inconceivable might upon Satan, that he should have given him the earth to knead it as he willed, to turn it over and trample upon it, to squeeze tears and blood out of it, to revolve it as with a whirlwind, to storm it like a tempest, to consume it like flames.

His Apostle heart was alarmed by these thoughts. In spirit he spoke to the Master.

"Oh, Lord!" he cried, "what shall I do in this city to which thou hast sent me? Seas and lands belong to it, the beasts of the field and the living creatures in the water

belong to it. Other kingdoms and cities belong to it, and the thirty legions which guard them. I, oh, Lord, am but a fisherman from a lake. What shall I do? How shall I overcome its malice?"

He raised his gray trembling head towards heaven, praying and calling from the depths of his heart to his Divine Master, full of sadness and fear.

Lygia interrupted him.

"The whole city is as if on fire," she said.

And in very truth the sun set that day in strange fashion. Its enormous shield had now sunk halfway behind the Janiculum Hill. The entire expanse of heaven was filled with a fiery glow. From the place in which they stood, their glance embraced a vast expanse. A little to the right they saw the long extending walls of the Circus Maximus, above it the towering palaces of the Palatine, and in front of them, beyond the ox market and the Velabrum, the top of the capital with the temple of Jupiter. But the walls, the columns, and the tops of the temples were flooded in that golden and purple light. Such of the river as could be seen from a distance seemed to flow as with blood. As the sun sank lower behind the mountains, the glow flushed redder, like the reflection of a conflagration, and it increased and widened until finally it embraced the seven hills, whence it poured over the whole surrounding country.

"The entire city seems on fire," repeated Lygia.

Peter shaded his eyes with his hand.

"The wrath of God is upon it," said he.

CHAPTER XV

Vinitius to Lygia:

The slave Phlegon, by whom I send thee this letter, is a Christian. So he is one of those who are to receive freedom at thy hands. Oh, Beloved!

He is an old servant of our house. I can place full confidence in him, and have no fear that the letter will fall into other hands than thine. I am writing from Laurentum, where we have stopped on account of the heat. Otho, former husband of Poppaea, possessed here a splendid villa, which he donated to her, and she, although divorced from him, held it no shame to retain the gift. When I think of those women who surround me now, and then of thee, it seems to me that from the stones thrown by Deucalion must have arisen various species of people absolutely unlike, and that thou belongest to the species that was born from crystal.

I admire and love thee with all my soul, so that I wish to speak only of thee. I must restrain myself, in order to tell thee something about the journey and how I am faring and what is the news of the court. Well, Caesar was the guest of Poppaea, who had secretly prepared for him a splendid reception. She invited few of the Augustales, but Petronius and I were summoned. After the noon-day meal we sailed in golden boats over the sea, which was calm as if it were sleeping, and as blue as thine eyes, oh, my divinity. We rowed ourselves, for it evidently flattered Augusta to feel that she was rowed by men of consular dignity, or their sons. Caesar, standing by the rudder in a purple toga, sang a hymn, which he had composed last night, in honor of the sea. He and Diodorus arranged the music.

Indian slaves in the other boats accompanied him on sea shells, while all around appeared numerous dolphins, as if really enticed from the depths of the sea by the music. Knowest thou what I did? I thought of thee and longed for thee. I wanted to grasp the sea, the calm weather, and the music and give all to thee.

Dost thou wish that we should live some time on the shores of the sea far from Rome, oh, my Augusta? I have an estate in Sicily, whereon there is a forest of almonds, which blossoms rose-colored in Spring, and is so near to the sea that the ends of its branches almost touch the water. There I will love thee and

adore the creed that Paul will teach me, for I know now that it is not opposed to love and happiness.

Dost thou wish this? But before I hear the answer from thy beloved lips, I will write thee further what happened in the boat.

Soon the shore was left far behind us. A sail arose in the distance. A discussion arose as to whether it were a mere fisherman's boat or the great vessel from Ostia. I recognized it first. The Augusta said that it was evident nothing could be hidden from my eyes. Covering her face with a veil she asked me whether I could recognize her even so. Petronius answered at once that even the sun cannot be recognized behind a cloud. She laughingly retorted that so keen a glance as mine could be blinded by love alone. Naming different ladies of the court, she asked me which I loved. I answered calmly enough, until she mentioned thy name. Speaking of thee, she uncovered her face, and cast upon me a look with evil and inquiring eyes.

I feel true gratitude to Petronius, who inclined the boat at that moment, and so drew general attention from me. I swear that if I had heard thy name mentioned in a slighting tone, I should not have been able to hide my wrath, but should have had to struggle with the impulse to break the head of this bad and treacherous woman with my oar. Dost thou remember the occurrence on the pond of Agrippa, when we were at Linus's house on the eve of my departure?

Petronius is alarmed for my fate, and even to-day he implored me not to hurt the vanity of the Augusta. But Petronius does not understand me fully, and knows not that beyond thee there is no delight nor beauty nor love, and that for Poppaea I have only aversion and scorn. Thou hast greatly changed my soul—so greatly that I could not even entertain the idea of going back to my former life. But be not afraid that harm may reach me here. Poppaea does not love me, for she is incapable of love. Her caprices arise only from her anger against

Caesar, who is still under her influence, and who may even still love her. Yet he, on his part, does not spare her nor hide from her his shamelessness and his crimes.

I will tell thee, besides, something which should reassure thee. Peter, when I parted from him, told me not to fear Caesar, as not a hair of my head would be injured. I believe him. Some voice in my soul tells me that every word of his must be fulfilled. Since he blessed our love neither Caesar nor all the powers of Hades, nor fate itself, can take thee away from me. Oh, Lygia! When I think thus I am as happy as though I were in heaven, which alone is peaceful and happy. But thou, as a Christian, mayest be hurt by what I say of heaven and fate. If so, forgive me. I sin against my will. Baptism has not yet washed me. But my heart is as an empty cup which Paul of Tarsus will fill with thy sweet creed, so much sweeter to me because it is thine. Thou, oh my divinity, count it as a merit to me that from this cup I have emptied the liquid which formerly filled it, and that I do not keep it back, but stretch it forward as a thirsty man standing by a pure spring. Let me find favor in thy eyes.

In Antium my days and nights will pass in hearing Paul, who already on the first day of the journey acquired such influence over my people, that they surround him continuously, seeing in him not merely a wonder-worker, but an almost supernatural being. Yesterday I saw joy on his face. And when I asked him what he was doing he answered, "I am sowing." Petronius knows that he is among my people, and wishes to see him. So does Seneca, who heard of him from Gallo.

But the stars are now paling, oh Lygia! while the morning star glows still brighter. Soon the dawn will make a rose of the sea. The whole world is asleep. But I am thinking of thee and loving thee. Let me salute thee as well as the morning dawn, oh my betrothed!

CHAPTER XVI

Vinitius to Lygia:

Dearest, hast thou ever accompanied the Auli to Antium? If not, it will give me happiness some time to show it to thee. All along the seashore from Laurentum stands a row of villas. Antium is itself a succession of palaces and porticos, whose columns are reflected in the water in bright weather. I, too, have a villa right by the water with an olive grove and a forest of cypresses behind the villa. When I remember that this villa will sometime be thine, its marbles seem to me even whiter, its gardens more shady, and the sea more deeply azure.

Oh, Lygia! how good it is to live and love! Old Menikles who has charge of the villa has planted great bunches of irises under the myrtles on the lawns. At the sight of them the home of the Auli, and the fountain and the garden in which I used to seat myself beside thee, came back to mind. And, to thee also, these irises will recall thy own home. So I am sure thou wilt love Antium and this villa.

After our arrival we had long talks with Paul at the noon-day meal. We spoke of thee. In due time he began to teach. I listened and I will say to thee, that even had I the pen of a Petronius, I could not explain to thee all that passed through my mind and soul. I had not conceived the possibility of such happiness, such peace, such infinite calm. But all these things I keep for my converse with thee. At the first free moment I shall be in Rome.

Tell me, how can the world find room at once for such men as the Apostles Peter and Paul, and such a man as Caesar? I ask this because the evening of that same day I passed at Nero's palace. I will tell thee what occurred there. First, Caesar read his poem on the destruction of Troy and complained that he had never seen

a burning city. He envied Priam. He called him happy for that he had witnessed the burning and destruction of his native city. Whereupon Tigellinus replied: "Say but the word, oh divine one, and ere night passes thou wilt see Antium in flames." Caesar in return called him a fool. "Where," he asked, "should I come to breathe the air of the sea, and preserve this voice with which the gods have gifted me, and which men tell me I should carefully preserve for the benefit of humanity? Is it not Rome that harms me? Are not the stenches of the Suburra and the Esquiline responsible for the hoarseness in my throat? Would not burning Rome present a spectacle a hundredfold more splendid and tragic than Antium? Here all broke in with exclamations. What an unspeakable tragedy it would be that the city which had conquered the world should be changed into a heap of gray ashes. Caesar insisted that his poem would in that case surpass the songs of Homer. He explained how he would rebuild the city, and how future generations would admire the work, which should throw all other human achievements into the shade. The drunken feasters joined in with shouts of "Do it!" "Nay," he replied, "I should have friends truer and more attached to me." On hearing this, I confess it, I grew uneasy. For thou, oh beloved, art in Rome. Now I laugh at those fears. No matter how mad they may be, Caesar and his courtiers would not dare to reach that pitch of madness. But see how love unnerves a man! I should prefer it if the house of Linus did not stand in a narrow alley of the Trans-Tiber, nor in a quarter inhabited by aliens who would receive the least consideration of all in case of any disaster. In my eyes, the palaces on the Palatine themselves are not worthy of thee. It would please me also to know thou lackest none of those comforts and luxuries to which thou hast been accustomed from childhood.

Go to the house of Aulus, oh Lygia! I have given much thought to this matter. Were Caesar in Rome, news of thy return might readily reach the Palatine

through the slaves. This might turn attention to thee, and renew thy persecution for that thou hadst dared to combat the will of Caesar. But his stay in Antium will be a long one. Before his return the gossip of the slaves will have ceased. Linus and Ursus might dwell with thee. I live in the hope, that ere the Palatine again beholds Caesar, thou, my divinity, wilt be dwelling with me in thine own house on the Carinae. Blessed be the day, and the hour and the minute, when thou passest my threshold. If Christ, whom I am learning to accept, will accomplish this, blessed also be His name. I will serve Him and give my life and my blood for Him. But I speak not aright. We will both serve Him as long as the thread of our lives endures. Love and greetings to thee from my inmost soul.

CHAPTER XVII

Ursus was drawing up a double vessel of water from the well, singing the while in an undertone a wondrous Lygian song, and casting glad looks at Lygia and Vinitius, who, white as two statues, stood among the cypresses in Linus's garden. Not a breeze stirred their garments. Twilight, lilac and golden, was falling upon the world, as with clasped hands they conversed in the evening calm.

"May not some harm befall thee," asked Lygia, "for that thou didst leave Antium without Ceasar's knowledge?"

"No, my beloved. Caesar gave out that he would lock himself up for two days with Terpnos, to compose new songs. He often does this, and then knows not nor remembers aught else. Besides, what should I care for Caesar, while I am beside thee, while I gaze upon thee? My longings grew greater than I could bear. For nights sleep has fled from me. More than once, when weariness overcame me, I was awakened by a sudden feeling

that danger was hanging over thee. At times, I dreamed that my relays of horses had been stolen, those horses which were to bear me from Antium to Rome, and which had already borne me from Rome to Antium with greater speed than any of Caesar's couriers. I could bear it no longer without thee. O, beloved, I love thee too much for that!"

"I knew that thou wouldst come. Twice, at my asking, did Ursus run to the Carinae to inquire for thee at thy house. Linus laughed at me and so did Ursus."

It was evident enough that she had expected him. In lieu of her usual dark robe, she wore a soft white gown, from whose graceful folds her head and shoulders blossomed out like primroses in Spring. A few rose-colored anemones adorned her hair.

Vinitius pressed his lips to her hand. Then they took their seats on a stone bench among the wild vines, and leaning shoulder to shoulder, gazed silently at the setting sun, whose last beams were reflected in their eyes.

The charm of peace of the evening stole softly over them.

"How calm it is here!" exclaimed Vinitius in a low tone. "How beautiful the world is. The night is cloudless. I have never felt happier in my life. Tell me, Lygia, the reason of this. Never did I conceive that love could be such as this. I deemed it a mere fire in the blood, a passion. I now see that we can love with every drop of blood, and every breath, yet feel a sweet and boundless calm, as though Sleep and Death had put the soul to rest. 'Tis a new experience for me. I gaze upon the outer calm of the trees, and it seems to be within me. Now for the first time I understand there may be a happiness of which men hitherto have not conceived. Now for the first time I understand why thou and Pomponia Graecina enjoy such peace. Yea, Christ giveth that peace!"

Lygia, leaning her beautiful head on his arm, replied:

"My dear Marcus—" She could not continue. Joy, gratitude and the feeling that love was now lawful to

her, took away her voice and filled her eyes with tears.

Vinitius, slipping his arm around her slender form, drew her towards him.

"Blessed be the moment," he cried, "when I first heard His name."

"I love thee, Marcus," was her low-voiced reply.

Both were silent now. Their overcharged breasts forbade further utterance. The last lilac reflection had faded away from the cypresses. The crescent moon was now silvering the garden. Vinitius was the first to speak.

"I know. Scarce had I entered here, scarce had I kissed thy beloved hands, ere I read in thine eyes the questions. Had I arrived at a full understanding of that divine creed which thou professest? Am I baptized? No, not yet am I baptized. Know thou why, my flower? Paul said to me, 'I have convinced thee that God hath come into the world and given Himself to be crucified for the salvation of the world. But let Peter cleanse thee in the stream of grace. Peter who first stretched his hands over thee and blessed thee.' I wish thee, my beloved, to be present at my baptism, and that Pomponia stand as my sponsor. That is why I have not yet been baptized, though I believe in the Saviour and His sweet teaching. Paul has convinced and converted me. How could it be otherwise? How could I fail to believe that Christ came into the world when Peter says so, who was his disciple, and Paul, to whom he manifested Himself? How can I fail to believe Him God, who rose from the dead? He was seen in the city, on the lake, on the mountain. He was seen by men whose lips knew not how to form a lie. I believed all this from the first time I heard Peter in the Ostranium. Even then I said to myself, I could believe any man on earth to be a liar before this one who says 'I have seen.' But I dreaded your creed. I feared it would separate thee from me. I thought that there was in it neither wisdom, nor beauty, nor happiness. But today I understand it. What sort of man should I be, if

I did not desire for the world, truth, not lies; love, not hate; good, not evil; loyalty, not disloyalty; charity, not vengeance? What sort of man would he be who would not prefer and wish the same? Thy religion teaches all these things. Other creeds also aim at justice, but thine is the only creed which makes just the heart of man, and, moreover, makes it pure, like thine and Pomponia's, and loyal, like thine and Pomponia's. Blind should I be if I could not see this. And if, in addition, Christ-God hath promised eternal life and happiness so boundless as only the all-mightiness of God could bestow, what more could man wish? Were I to ask Seneca, wherefore should he recommend virtue, if wickedness brought me more happiness, he could return no logical answer. But now I see that I should be virtuous, because virtue and love flow from Christ, and because when Death closes my eyes, I shall find new life and new happiness, find myself and thee, oh my beloved. Why not accept a creed which teaches truth and annihilates death? Who would not prefer good to evil? I had thought this creed opposed to happiness. But Paul hath convinced me that it takes away nothing and adds all. Hardly yet does all this find room in my brain, but I know it to be true, for I should never have been thus happy had I taken thee by force and possessed thee in my home. Lo, but a moment since thou didst say 'I love thee,' and I could not have extorted these words from thee with all the powers of Rome. Oh, Lygia! Reason declares this creed to be divine, to be the best. The heart feels it. Who can withstand two such forces?"

Lygia listened. Her blue eyes fixed on his face seemed mystic flowers in the moonlight, and bedewed like flowers.

"True, Marcus," she said, nestling her head closer to his arm. Both felt supremely happy. They understood that not only love, but another power united them, sweet at once, and irresistible, through which love itself became unassailable by change, deceit, treason, or death itself. Their hearts overflowed with the certainty that, come

what might, they would not cease to love and belong to each other. Hence, an unspeakable calm possessed them. Vinitius felt that not only was their love pure and deep, but of a sort that the world did not yet know, and could not give. This love gathered all things into his heart, Lygia, Christ's teachings, the moonlight softly sleeping on the cypresses and the calm of the night, so that all space seemed to be filled with it alone.

Then in a low and trembling voice he began:

"Thou wilt be the soul of my soul, the dearest for me in all the world. Our hearts will throb together, one in prayer, and one in gratitude to Christ. Oh, my beloved! Together to live, together to honor God, to know that when Death comes, our eyes will again open, as after refreshing sleep, to a new light! What greater happiness could be conceived? My sole marvel is that I had not comprehended this sooner. Knowest thou what I now think? That nothing can resist this creed. In two or three hundred years the whole world will accept it. Men will forget Jupiter. There will be no God save Christ, no temples save the Christian. Who would not desire his own happiness? Ah, I have heard Paul's conversation with Petronius. Knowest thou what Petronius said at the close? 'Tis not for me.' That was all he could say."

"Repeat the words of Paul," said Lygia.

"'Twas at my house. Petronius one evening had been speaking lightly and jestingly as is his wont. Paul said to him, 'How canst thou, oh, wise Petronius, deny that Christ existed, and that he rose from the dead, when thou wert not then in the world? But Peter and John saw Him. I myself saw Him on the road to Damascus. If thy wisdom could show that we are liars, then thou mightest well deny our testimony.' Petronius replied that he had no intention of denying, for he well knew that many incredible things had happened and were confirmed by unimpeachable witnesses. 'But,' said he, 'tis one thing to discover a new foreign God, and another to accept his creed. I wish for nothing that may spoil my

life and destroy its beauty. Be our gods true or false, they are beautiful. We rejoice in them, and can live without care.' Paul's reply was, 'Thou wouldst reject the teaching of love, justice and mercy for fear of the cares of life. But bethink thee, Petronius, is thy life truly free from cares? Behold, neither thou, nor any amongst the mightiest knows when he falls asleep at night whether he may not be awakened by a death sentence. Now if Caesar professed this creed of charity and justice, would not thy happiness be more secure? Thou fearest lest thy pleasure be lost to thee, but would not life itself be pleasanter in such case? As to the beauty and the adornment of life, if ye have raised temples and statues of such surpassing loveliness to evil, vengeful, adulterous, and false divinities, what might ye not do in honor of one God of love and truth? Thou flatterest thyself that thy lot is a happy one, because thou art mighty and livest in luxury, but thou mightst easily have been poor and destitute, however high-born, and then indeed it would be better for thee in this world if men professed Christ. In your city, even parents of high station, unwilling to assume the care of raising children, cast them out into the streets. These children are called alumni. Thou, master, might have been such an alumnus. But if thy parents lived in conformity with our creed that could not happen. If after reaching man's estate thou hadst married a woman whom thou lovest, thou wouldst prefer that she should remain faithful to thee unto death. And now behold what is going on among you! Behold what debasement, what shamelessness, what abuse of marital faith. Nay, you marvel among yourselves when you hear of a woman whom you call a univira, or a woman of a single husband. But I say unto thee, that wives who carry Christ in their hearts will not break faith with their husbands, and that Christian husbands will keep faith with their wives. But ye are not sure of your rulers, your fathers, your wives, your children, your servants. The whole world trembles before ye, and ye tremble before your own slaves, for ye know that any hour may

call forth a terrible war against your oppression, such a war as has already arisen more than once.

" 'Thou art rich. But thou knowest not that to-morrow thou mayest not be ordered to surrender thy riches. Thou art young. But thou knowest not whether to-morrow will not be thy death-day. Thou lovest. But treason lies in wait for thee. Thou art fond of villas and statues. But to-morrow thou mayest be banished to the desert places of the Pandataria. Thou hast thousands of servants. But to-morrow thy servants may spill thy blood. If all this be true, how canst thou be calm and happy, how canst thou find pleasure in life? But I proclaim love. I proclaim a creed which commands rulers to love their subjects, and masters their slaves, commands slaves to serve from love, proclaims justice and charity, and promises at the end unlimited and eternal happiness. Therefore, oh, Petronius, how canst thou say that this creed ruins life, since it supplies its shortcomings, and since thou thyself wouldst be a hundredfold happier and safer if it were to win the world as your Roman rule has won it?' Such were Paul's words. Then it was Petronius said, ' 'Tis not for me.' Feigning weariness, he rose to go, and as he did so he continued, 'I prefer my Eunice to all thy creed, oh, Judean, but I would not care to be matched against thee on the platform.' As for me, I had listened with all my soul, and when Paul spoke of our women I honored with all my heart that creed whence thou didst spring as lilies spring from a rich soil in April. And I thought to myself, 'Lo! there is Poppaea who left two husbands for Nero, there are Calvia Crispinilla and Nigidia, and almost all the women I know save only Pomponia, all have made traffic of their faith and their vows. But she whom I love, she will not desert me nor deceive me, nor quench the fire at my hearth-stone, though all others in whom I placed my trust might desert and deceive me. Hence I spoke to thee in my soul. How can I recompense thee save by love and honor? Didst thou feel that at Antium I talked incessantly to thee is if thou wert by my side?

A hundredfold have I loved thee for that thou didst flee from me in Caesar's palace. And I no longer desire Caesar's palace, nor its luxury, nor its music, but thee only. Speak but the word, and we will leave Rome to take up our residence afar off."

Without removing her head, Lygia thoughtfully raised her eyes to the silvered tops of the cypresses, and answered:

"'Tis well, Marcus. Thou hast written to me of Sicily. The Auli wish to settle there for their old age."

Vinitius joyfully interrupted her.

"True, my beloved. Our lands adjoin. 'Tis a marvellous coast. The climate is delightful, and the nights are still brighter than in Rome, fragrant and clear. There life and happiness are synonyms!"

He paused to dream of the future.

"There we may forget all our troubles in the groves among the olive orchards. We will walk and rest in the shade. Oh, Lygia, what a life that will be, loving each other, gazing together upon the sea and the sky, honoring together a God of love, doing peacefully what is just and right."

Both paused, their thoughts intent upon the future. He drew her closer to him, the knightly ring on his finger sparkling in the moonlight. In the quarter inhabited by the laboring classes every one was asleep. Not a sound disturbed the silence.

"Wilt thou allow me to see Pomponia?" asked Lygia.

"Yes, my beloved. We will invite them to our home, or visit them ourselves. And if thou wilt, we can take in the Apostle Peter. He is bowed down by age and work. Paul also will visit us. He will convert Aulus Plautius. And just as soldiers found colonies in far-off countries, so we will found a settlement of Christians."

Lygia took his hand in hers, and would have raised it to her lips. But he whispered, as though fearful that too loud a tone might frighten happiness away:

"No, Lygia—no! It is I who honor and adore thee. Give me thy hands."

"I love thee."

He pressed his lips to her hands, white as jessamine. For a moment the beating of their own hearts was the only sound they heard. There was not the least stir in the air. The cypresses were immovable as if they, too, held their breath in suspense.

An unexpected sound, as of thunder, coming apparently from the ground, broke in upon the silence. A shiver ran through the girl's body. Vinitius rose, saying:

"'Tis the roaring of lions in the menagerie."

Both listened intently. The first roar was answered by a second, a third, a tenth, from all the various quarters of the city. There were often several thousand lions in Rome, quartered in different arenas. Frequently at night-time they approached the gratings, and, leaning thereon their huge heads, proclaimed their longing for liberty and the desert. So it happened now. One answered the other in the stillness of the night. The whole city was filled with their roaring. So strangely menacing and lugubrious was the sound that Lygia, whose bright and peaceful dreams of the future were frightened away, listened with a heart compressed by some strange fear and melancholy.

Vinitius slipped his arm around her.

"Fear not, beloved," he said, "the games are at hand. Hence all the menageries are filled."

They both entered the house of Linus, accompanied by the roars of the lions growing more and more thunderous.

CHAPTER XVIII

Meanwhile in Antium, Petronius gained almost daily victories over the courtiers vying with him for Caesar's favor. The influence of Tigellinus had utterly declined. In Rome, when it seemed desirable to put out of the way such men as seemed dangerous, to confiscate their estates,

to settle public affairs, to prepare spectacles that astonished alike by their splendor and their barbaric taste, or generally to satisfy the monstrous caprices of Caesar, Tigellinus, crafty, and resourceful, seemed absolutely indispensable. In Antium, however, among the palaces overlooking the azure sea, Caesar led a Hellenic life. From morn until night poems were read, their metrical structure was discussed, their subtlest graces dilated upon. Music and the theatre—in short, all which Grecian genius had invented for the adornment of life, found ready appreciation. Petronius—more cultured than Tigellinus or the other courtiers, witty, eloquent, full of the most delicate tastes and feelings—could not help attaining preeminence. Caesar sought his society, consulted him in all things, and accepted his advice when he was composing. His friendship was greater than it had ever been.

To the courtiers it appeared that the triumph of Petronius was permanently assured. Even those who had hitherto looked askance at the exquisite epicurean now surrounded him and sued for his favor. More than one was, in his inner soul, pleased at the victory of a man who always had a definite opinion, who accepted with a sceptical smile the flatteries of his whilom enemies, but who, either through indolence or a natural refinement, was not revengeful and did not use his power to the damage of others. There were moments when he might have ruined Tigellinus. He preferred to laugh at him, and to expose his lack of education and culture.

The Senate in Rome took breath again. For a month and a half no sentence of death had been pronounced. True, both in Rome and in Antium, tales were whispered of the refinement of debauchery to which Caesar and his new favorite had attained. Nevertheless, all preferred to be ruled by a refined Caesar than by one bestialized at the hands of a Tigellinus. Tigellinus himself lost his head. He hesitated whether or not to throw up his hands. For Caesar repeatedly asserted that in all the Roman court there were but two true Hellenes, two souls that understood each other, himself and Petronius.

The astonishing adroitness of the latter confirmed every one in the opinion that his influence would outlast all others. No one could explain how Caesar could live without him. With whom should he speak of poesy, of music, of racing? In whose eyes could he look to find if his own creations were indeed perfect? Petronius, indifferent as ever, seemed to attach no weight to his position. As ever he was deliberate, indolent, witty and sceptical. Often he produced upon others the impression of one who jested at them, at himself, at Caesar, at all the world. At times he even durst criticise Nero to his face, and even when those around him deemed that he had gone too far and was preparing for himself certain destruction, he knew how to turn the criticism so that it resulted in his own gain. People marvelled at his cleverness. They began to think that there was no difficulty from which he could not triumphantly extricate himself.

A week after Vinitius's return to Rome, Caesar read to a small audience a passage from his Troyad. When he had finished and the cries of admiration had ceased, Petronius in answer to a glance of Caesar, said:

"Bad verses, fit only to be cast into the flames."

The hearts of all present stood still with terror. Never since his childhood had Nero heard such a sentence from the lips of any one. The face of Tigellinus alone glowed with delight. But Vinitius grew pale. He feared that Petronius, who had never been overcome with wine, was now at last intoxicated.

Nero in a honeyed voice, tremulous none the less with deeply wounded vanity, inquired:

"What fault dost thou find with them?"

Petronius did not quail.

"Do not believe them," he cried, pointing to those around him. "They know nothing. Thou askest me what fault I find in thy verse. If thou wishest the truth, I will tell thee. They would be good for Vergil, for Ovid, even for Homer, but not for thee. Thou art not free to write such verse. The conflagration thou de-

scribest dost not blaze enough. Hearken not to the flatterers of Lucan. Had he written the verses, I should own their genius. In thy case it is different. Knowest thou why? Thou art greater than these. From one so richly dowered by the gods much more is demanded. But thou art indolent. Thou preferrest rather to sleep after dinner than to sit thyself down to arduous labor. Thou hast it in thee to create a work above all that the world has yet seen. So I tell thee to thy face, write a better poem."

He spoke with a lightsome air as of one who mingled banter with chiding. Caesar's eyes clouded over with a mist of delight.

"The gods gave me a little talent," he said. "But they have given me also something still better—a true critic and a true friend, who alone knows how to tell me the truth to my face."

He stretched out his fat hand, overgrown with rusty hair, to a gold candle-stick plundered from the temple of Delphi, as if to burn the verses. Petronius snatched them away from him before the flames had touched the papyrus.

"Nay, nay," said he, "even as they are, they belong to humanity. Let me have them."

"Then allow me to send them to thee in a cylinder of my own invention," answered Nero, embracing Petronius.

"True," he continued after a moment, "thou art right. My conflagration does not burn enough. But I deemed it sufficient if I could merely equal Homer. A certain diffidence and self-distrust have always stood in my way. Thou hast opened my eyes. Knowest thou why it is as thou sayest? When a sculptor determines upon creating the statue of a god he seeks the model. But I had no model. Never have I seen a burning city. Hence my description lacks verity."

"Then I will tell thee that only a great artist could appreciate the fact."

Nero meditated a moment. Then he spoke.

"Answer me one question, Petronius. Art thou sorry that Troy was burned?"

"Am I sorry? By the lame husband of Venus, not in the least. I will tell thee why. Troy would not have been burned if Prometheus had not given fire to man, nor the Greeks made war upon Priam. Had there been no fire Aeschylus would not have written his Prometheus, just as Homer without war would not have written his Iliad. I prefer the existence of Prometheus and the Iliad to the preservation of a small and probably unclean city, in the midst of which some paltry magistrate might now be sitting and annoying thee by his disputes with the local council."

"That is what we call rational talk," replied Caesar. "For poetry and art, it is allowable, nay it is necessary to sacrifice everything. Happy the Achaians who gave a subject to the Iliad, happy Priam, who witnessed the destruction of his native city. As to me I have never seen a burning city."

A moment of silence followed. Tigellinus was the first to break it.

"Nay, Caesar, I have spoken. Say but the word and I will burn Antium. Or if thou wouldst take compassion on these villas and palaces I will order the vessels in Ostia to be burned, or will build a wooden city for thee beneath the Alban Hills, into which thou thyself may cast the fire. Is such thy wish?"

Nero cast upon him a glance of withering contempt.

"Am I to gaze on burning wood-sheds?" he asked. "Thy reason is failing thee, Tigellinus. Moreover I see that thou settest no great store by my talent, or my Troyad, if thou thinkest any sacrifice were too great for it."

Tigellinus drew back abashed. Nero, as if wishing to change the conversation, added: "Summer is at hand. How all Rome must smell at present! Yet we must return for the summer games."

"O, Caesar," put in Tigellinus, "when thou dost dis-

miss the Augustales allow me to remain for a while with thee."

An hour later Vinitius was on his way home with Petronius from Caesar's villa.

"I had a moment's fright on thy account," said the younger man, "I thought that thou wast drunk and had irretrievably ruined thyself. Remember that thou art playing with Death."

" 'Tis my arena," said Petronius lightly, "I enjoy the feeling that I am the best gladiator there. See what the end was. My influence has only increased the more. He will send me his verses in a cylinder which I wager is as rich in value as it is barbarous in taste. I shall order my doctor to keep laxatives in it. I have a second reason. Tigellinus, witnessing my success, will doubtless attempt to imitate me. I can imagine what will happen when he attempts a jest. 'Twill be as if a Pyrennean bear were to dance a tight rope. I shall laugh like Democritus. If I willed it I might easily ruin Tigellinus and succeed him as the pretorian prefect. Then Bronzebeard himself would be in my clutches. But I am indolent. I prefer my present life, even with the verses of Caesar."

"What adroitness to turn criticism into flattery! But tell me are those verses so bad? I do not claim to be a judge in such matters."

"Not worse than many others. Lucan has more talent in his little finger. Yet Bronzebeard is not entirely lacking. He has, first, a great love for poetry and music. Two days from now we shall call upon him to listen to his verses in honor of Aphrodite, which he will finish today or to-morrow. There will be only a small audience —myself, thyself, Tullius Senecio, and young Nerva. As to the verses it is not true, as I once said, that I use them after feasting for the same purpose to which Vitelius devotes flamingo feathers. They are sometimes eloquent. The words of Hecuba are impressive. She complains of the pains of child-birth. Nero found apt

enough expressions, perchance, because he himself painfully brings forth every verse. Sometimes I pity him. By Pollux! how strange a mixture he is! Caligula was insane, but he was not such a ridiculous creature."

"Who can foretell whither Bronzebeard's madness will lead?" asked Vinitius.

"No living man. Things may happen whose very remembrance may for entire centuries make the hair stand on men's heads. That is just what interests me. Though I am frequently bored, even as Jupiter Ammon in the desert, yet I believe under any other Caesar I should have been still more bored. Thy Jewish friend is eloquent, I acknowledge that. If his religion triumphs, then our gods must take serious thought lest they be retired on the shelf. Of course, if Caesar were a Christian, we should all feel more secure. But thy prophet of Tarsus, in reasoning with me, failed to understand that in this very insecurity lies for me the charm of life. He who never plays dice will never lose his property. Nevertheless men play dice. There is in it some strange delight and oblivion. I have known knights and the sons of senators who have been glad to become gladiators. Thou tellest me I play with life. 'Tis true enough. But I do it because it diverts me. Your Christian virtues would bore me as much in a day as the discourses of Seneca. That is why the eloquence of Paul went to waste. He ought to understand that men such as I can never accept his creed. With thee 'tis different. A man of thy disposition might hate the very name of Christian like the plague, or might become one himself. Yawningly I recognize the truth of their arguments. We do mad things. We are hurrying to the verge of an abyss, an unknown something signals to us from the future, something is breaking under our feet, something is dying around us. So be it! But we at least shall be able to die. In the meantime we have no desire to add a burden to life or to experience death before it arrives. Life exists for itself alone, not for death."

"Nevertheless, I pity thee, Petronius."

"Do not pity me more than I myself pity. Formerly it was thy wont to enjoy thyself among us. While campaigning in Armenia, they wert ever longing for Rome."

"And now, also, I long for Rome."

"Yea, for thou art in love with a Christian virgin dwelling in the Trans-Tiber. I do not marvel at this, nor do I reproach thee. Rather I marvel that in spite of a creed which thou hast described as a sea of happiness, and in spite of that love which will soon be crowned, melancholy appears to oppress thee. Pomponia Graecina is always serious, and thou, since thou becamest a Christian, hast ceased to smile. So tell me not that it is a joyous creed. From Rome thou hast returned more despondent than ever. If this be the Christian manner of loving, by the yellow curls of Bacchus! I for one will not follow your example."

"Let me explain," replied Vinitius, "I swear to thee, not by the curls of Bacchus, but by the soul of my father, that never in days of yore did I experience even a foretaste of the happiness in which I live at present. Nevertheless, I feel an endless longing, and what is even stranger, when I am away from Lygia I have a foreboding that some danger is hanging over her. What it may be and whence it may come, I know not, but I feel it in advance just as one feels the coming storm."

"In two days I shall strive to obtain for thee permission to leave Antium for as long a time as it may please thee. Poppaea is a little more tranquil, and, so far as I can see, no peril threatens either thee or Lygia from that quarter."

"Yet to-day she asked me what I had been doing in Rome, yet my absence was a secret."

"Perchance she gave orders to have thy steps dogged by spies. But even she must reckon with me in future."

"Paul," resumed Vinitius, "has told me that God sometimes sends warnings, but forbids the belief in omens, so I struggle against this feeling, but cannot entirely master it. I will relieve the burden of my heart by telling thee what happened. Lygia and I sitting side by side

on a night as bright as this, laid our plans for the future. I cannot tell thee how calm and happy we were. Suddenly the lions began to roar. 'Tis no uncommon sound in Rome, but since that moment I have had no rest. It seemed to me there was a menace in it, a presage of misfortune. Thou knowest I do not readily yield to fear, but that sound filled all the night with terror. It came so strangely and unexpectedly, that those roars still resound in my ear, and constant uneasiness possesses my heart, as though Lygia needed my assistance against something terrible, even against those very lions. I am in torture. Therefore obtain permission for me to leave, otherwise I will go without it. I cannot remain here. I repeat it, I cannot."

Petronius laughed. "Not yet," he said, "has it come to the point of throwing men of consular dignity or their wives to the lions in the arenas. Any other death may be in store for thee, but not that. Of course they may not have been lions, for the German bulls roar no more gently. For my part I make a mock of omens and prognostics. Last night was warm, and I saw stars falling like rain. More than one man would have grown uneasy at such a sight, but I thought to myself, 'if my star be among them at least I shall not lack company.'" He stopped short. After a moment's thought he added: "Look you, if your Christ rose from the dead, he will be able to protect you both from death."

"He can indeed," answered Vinitius, gazing upward at the star-strewn vault of Heaven.

CHAPTER XIX

Nero played and sang a hymn in honor of the Lady of Cyprus. Words and music had been composed by himself. He was in good voice that day. He felt that his music really charmed the hearers. This feeling added power to the sounds he produced. His soul thrilling in

unison gave him the appearance of an inspired one. He paled from genuine emotion. For perhaps the first time in his life he turned a deaf ear to the praises of his audience. He sat for a time with his hands leaning on the lyre and his head bowed. Then suddenly arising, he said: "I am weary; I need fresh air. Tune my lyre in the meanwhile." He wrapped a silk kerchief around his throat. Turning to Petronius and Vinitius, who were sitting in the corner of the hall, he said: "Come ye with me. Give me thy hand, Vinitius, for I am weary. Petronius and I will converse of music."

They went out together on the terrace, with its alabaster pavement strewn with crocuses. "'Tis easier to breathe here," said Nero. "My soul is filled with emotion and melancholy. Although I see that with the song which I have just sung to you as a test, I can make my appearance before the public and gain a triumph such as has not fallen to the lot of any other Roman."

"Thou canst appear here, in Rome, and in Achaea. With all my heart and all my soul, I admire thee, oh, thou divine one!" replied Petronius.

"I know it. Thou art too indolent to constrain thyself to flattery. And thou art as sincere as Tullius Senecio, but thou hast more comprehension than he. Tell me, what is thy opinion of music?"

"When I listen to a poem, when I gaze upon a chariot driven by thee in the circus, or on a beautiful statue, temple or picture, I feel that I embrace the whole in my own mind, and that my admiration comprises all that those things can give, but when I listen to music, especially thine, oh, divine one! newer beauties and newer delights open up before me. I run after them and grasp them, but ere I can absorb them, still newer delights flow in upon me like waves of the sea rolling on from infinity. So I say to thee, that music is like the sea; we stand on one shore, and see boundless space before us, but the other shore is invisible."

"Ah, what a judge thou art!" said Nero. For awhile they walked in silence, save for the crocus leaves

crunched under their feet. "Thou hast expressed my thoughts," said Nero, at last. "I have always said that in all Rome none can understand me save thee alone. I think of music as thou dost. When I play and sing I see things that I knew not existed in my own dominions or in the whole world. Lo, I am Caesar and the world belongs to me. I am omnipotent. But music reveals to me new kingdoms, new mountains, new seas, new delights, all heretofore unknown to me. I cannot even name them, nor make them intelligible. I only feel them. I feel the presence of the gods; I feel Olympus is here. Some unearthly wind blows upon me. I see as in a mist some infinite splendor, calm and clear as sunrise. The Infinite appears to me. I will say to thee" (here Nero's voice trembled with genuine emotion) "that I, a Caesar and a god, feel myself to be a mere speck of dust. Canst thou believe me?"

"Yea, only a true artist can feel his insignificance in the presence of Art."

"This is a night of sincerity, so I spread out to thee my soul as to a friend. I will speak on. Dost thou imagine that I am blind, that I am bereft of reason? Dost thou think that I ignore the fact that on the very walls of Rome are written insults against me, that they call me the murderer of my mother and of my wife, that they look upon me as a ferocious tyrant, for that Tigellinus gained from me a few sentences of death against my enemies—yea, my beloved, they hold me to be a tyrant, and I know it. They have imputed to me such hideous cruelty that sometimes I ask myself whether I am indeed a monster. But these people fail to understand that a man's deeds may be cruel, yet he himself may not be cruel. Ah! no one will believe, even thou, my beloved, mayest not believe, that at times when music lulls my soul, I feel myself as innocent as a child in the cradle. By the stars that shine above us, I swear that I am speaking only the truth. Men know not how much of goodness lies in this heart, nor what treasures I can perceive there when music opens the door."

Petronius had no doubt that for the moment Nero was speaking sincerely, and that music might lay bare to the light the nobler faculties of his soul hidden under the mountains of egotism, debauchery, and crime. "It is necessary," he said, "to know thee as intimately as I do. Rome has never been able to appraise thee rightly." Caesar leaned more heavily on the arm of Vinitius, as if sinking beneath the burden of injustice.

"Tigellinus," he said, "has told me that in the Senate it is whispered that Diodorus and Terpnos play the lyre better than I do. They would deny me even this! Now tell me the truth, thou who speakest only the truth, do they play better than I, or only as well?"

"Not in the least. Thy touch is surer and has greater power. An artist is apparent in thee; in them only skillful artisans. Nay, more! After hearing their music one better understands what thou art."

"If that be so, let them live. They will never guess what a service thou hast just rendered them. Of course, if I had sentenced them I should have found others to take their place."

"And the people would have said that for the sake of music thou hast destroyed music in the State. Do not kill art for art's sake, oh, divine one!"

"How much dost thou differ from Tigellinus," replied Nero, "but see, I am an artist before everything. So long as music opens out to me new spaces which I have not yet divined, regions which are not under my rule, joys and delights which I have not known, I cannot live an ordinary life. Music reveals to me the extraordinary, and I seek it with all the powers with which the gods have dowered me. At times it appears to me that to reach those Olympian heights I must accomplish something that no man has yet accomplished; in good and in evil I must excel all humanity. I know, too, that the people suspect me of insanity, but I am not insane. I am only seeking. If I commit folly, it is from weariness and impatience at my own failure. I am seeking. Dost thou understand me? I wish to be greater than man,

for in this way alone can I be greatest as an artist."

He lowered his voice so that Vinitius should not hear him, and approaching his lips to the ear of Petronius, he whispered:

"Knowest thou that it was chiefly for this that I sentenced my mother and my wife to death? At the gates of the unknown world I wished to lay the greatest sacrifice of which man is capable. Then I thought something would happen, something that would open the doors behind which I could perceive the unknown. Let it be something marvellous or terrible beyond human conception, be it only great and uncommon! But the sacrifice was insufficient to open the door of the Empyrean. Something still greater is necessary. Let it be as the fates will."

"What is thy intention?"

"Thou wilt see, and sooner than thou dost imagine. Meantime, know thou this, there are two Neros, one the Nero known to the world, the other an artist known only to thee, who if he is as pitiless as death or as full of folly as Bacchus, is so only because he is stifled by the shallowness and the commonplace of life. Fain would I extirpate them, even with fire or iron. Oh, how base this world will be when I cease to exist! No man, not even thou, my beloved, has yet divined what an artist I am, but that is the very source of all my sufferings, and I say to thee in all truth that my soul sometimes grows as melancholy as those cypresses that loom up darkly before us. It is hard for a man to bear simultaneously the burden of the highest authority and of the highest talent."

"I sympathize with thee, oh, Caesar, with all my heart, and with me are the earth and the sea, not to mention Vinitius, who defies thee in his soul."

"I have always loved him," said Nero, "though he serves Mars and not the Muses."

"He serves Venus before all," replied Petronius.

Then the resolve came upon him to straighten out at one blow the affair of his sister's son, and to annihilate all the dangers that threatened him.

"He is enamored as Troilus was with Cressida. Grant, oh, Lord, that he return to Rome, for here he will wither. Knowest thou that the Lygian hostage whom thou didst give him is found again? Vinitius, in setting out for Antium, consigned her to the care of one Linus. I did not mention this to thee, for thou wert composing thy hymn, and that is the all-important thing. Vinitius would have made her his mistress, but when he found her to be as virtuous as Lucretia, he fell in love with her very virtue, and now wishes to marry her. She is the daughter of a king, and will bring no dishonor upon him. But he, like a true soldier, sighs and languishes, awaiting the permission of his Emperor."

"An Emperor does not select wives for his soldiers. Why, therefore, does he await my permission?"

"Lord, I have told thee that he adores thee."

"Then the more certain may he be of my permission. 'Tis a beautiful maiden, but too narrow in the hips. Augusta Poppaea made complaint of her before me that she had cast an evil eye on our child in the gardens of the Palatine."

"But I said to Tigellinus that Deities do not succumb to the evil eye. Remember, oh, divine one, how Vinitius grew confused before thee, and how thou thyself didst exclaim, 'I have him!' "

"I remember." He turned to Vinitius. "Dost thou love her as Petronius says?"

"Lord, I love her!" replied Vinitius.

"Then I command thee to go straight to Rome tomorrow to marry her. Appear not before me without the wedding ring."

"From my heart and my soul, I thank thee, oh, Lord!"

"Oh, how good it is," cried Caesar, "to make men happy. I would do nothing else all the rest of my life."

"Grant one favor more, oh, divinity," said Petronius. "Announce thy will in the presence of the Augusta. Vinitius would not dare to wed a woman whom the Augusta did not favor, but thou, oh, Lord, wilt with one

word dispel her prejudices, if thou declare that thou hast commanded this."

"Good!" said Caesar. "I can deny nothing to thee and to Vinitius."

He turned towards the villa. They followed him, their hearts beating with triumphant joy. Vinitius could hardly constrain himself from embracing Petronius at the thought that now all obstacles had been overcome.

In the great hall of the villa, young Nerva and Tullius Senecio conversed with the Augusta. Terpnos and Diodorus tuned their lyres. Nero, entering, took his seat in a chair inlaid with tortoise shell. He whispered something in the ear of the Grecian lad standing beside him. The lad disappeared and soon returned with a golden casket. Nero opened it, and taking out a necklace of large opals, exclaimed:

"Here are gems worthy of the evening!"

"The dawn glitters in them," said Poppaea, deeming that the necklace was intended for her.

Caesar dangled the necklace in the air. At last he said:

"Vinitius, thou wilt present this necklace from me to the young Lygian maiden, whom I command thee to marry."

Poppaea's eyes, glittering with wrath and amazement, passed from Caesar to Vinitius, and finally rested on Petronius. But the latter, leaning carelessly on the arm of a chair, passed his hand up and down the finger-board of the harp as though wishing to familiarize himself with its shape. Vinitius, after thanking Caesar, approached Petronius and said:

"How can I ever repay thee for what thou hast done to-day?"

"Sacrifice a pair of swans to Euterpe," said Petronius, "praise Caesar's songs, and make a mock of omens. I hope that the roaring of lions will not further disturb thy sleep nor that of thy lily."

"No," was Vinitius's answer. "Now I am entirely at ease."

"May fortune favor you. But now pay attention. Caesar is again taking up the lyre. Hold thy breath, listen, shed tears."

And, in fact, at this moment, Caesar grasped the lyre and lifted up his eyes. All conversation ceased. Men stood as if petrified. Terpnos and Diodorus, who were to accompany Caesar, looked on, gazing now at each other, now at Caesar's lips, waiting for the first notes.

Suddenly in the vestibule arose a tumult and alarm. From behind the curtain Tacon, Caesar's freedman, and the Consul Lecanius burst upon the scene. Caesar knitted his brows angrily.

"Forgive me, oh, divine Emperor!" said the panting Tacon. "Rome is on fire! The greater part of the city is in flames!"

At this news all leaped to their feet. Nero laid down the lyre and cried:

"Oh, gods! I shall see a burning city, and shall finish my Troyad." He turned to the Consul.

"If I set out at once," he asked, "shall I be in time to see the conflagration?"

"Lord!" replied the pallid-faced consul, "a sea of fire floats over the city; smoke suffocates the citizens; the people faint or throw themselves madly into the fire; Rome is perishing, oh, Lord!"

There was a moment of silence, broken by a cry from Vinitius:

"Woe is me, oh, unhappy one!"

And the young man, casting aside his toga, clad only in a single tunic, rushed out of the palace.

Nero lifted his hands toward Heaven, and cried.

"Woe to thee, holy city of Priam!"

CHAPTER XX

Vinitius had just time to bid a few slaves follow him. Then he sprang on his horse. He galloped through the deserted streets of Antium in the direction of Lauren-

tum. The awful news had thrown him into a state bordering on insanity. His brain was in a whirl. He felt ony that the black spectre of misfortune was sitting beside him on his horse, shouting in his ears "Rome is burning," and lashing himself and his horse to the utmost possible speed. With his head bent on the horse's neck he rode blindly on, in his single tunic, taking no note of the obstacles that might stand in his path.

It was a calm and starry night. The horse and its rider loomed like phantoms in the moonlight. The Idumean stallion, lowering its ears and stretching out its neck, flew like an arrow past the motionless cypresses and the white villas hidden amongst them. The trampling of hoofs on the flagstones roused the dogs here and there. Some chased barking after the apparition. Others, startled by its suddenness, bayed their dismay to the moon. The slaves, following behind Vinitius on slower horses, soon fell far in the rear. When he had whirled like a tempest through sleeping Laurentum, he turned towards Ardea, in which as in Aricium, Bovillae, and Ustrinum, he had kept relays of horses from the time of his arrival at Antium, so as to cover the distance between that city and Rome in the shortest possible time. Remembering these relays he did not hesitate to tax his horse's strength to the utmost.

Beyond Ardea to the northeast it seemed to him that a rosy reflection was mounting in the sky. It might be the dawn, for the hour was late, and in July day broke early. But a cry of fury and despair broke from him as he recognized that it might be the glare of the conflagration. The words of Lecanius rang in his ears. "The city is a sea of flames," and for a time he felt the menace of madness in his brain, for he had lost all hope of saving Lygia, or even of reaching the city before it became a heap of ashes. His thoughts outspeeded the onrush of his horse and flew before him like a flock of dark birds, monstrous and despairing. He knew not indeed in what quarter of the city the flames had started, but he took it for granted that the Trans-Tiber, with its store of houses,

lumber yards, and wooden sheds, would become the first victim to the flames.

Fires were not infrequent in Rome. Rioting and looting were their usual accompaniments, especially in the quarters inhabited by the poor and the semi-barbarous. What, therefore, might not occur in the Trans-Tiber, a hotbed for the rabble which flooded into Rome from all sides? The thought of Ursus and of his extraordinary strength flashed into the mind of Vinitius. But what could one man do, even though he were a Titan, against the overwhelming force of a fire?

The fear of an uprising of the slaves was a spectre that had overshadowed Rome for years. From lip to lip had passed the report that hundreds of thousands of these people still cherished the dreams that they had inherited from the time of Spartacus, still waited for the first opportune moment to take up arms against their conquerors and against Rome. And now the moment had come! Even now battle and slaughter as well as fire might be raging in the city. The pretorians themselves, at the command of Caesar, might have hurled themselves against it with murderous intent.

At that thought the hair rose on his head from fear. He recalled the tales of burning cities so persistently repeated at Caesar's court, and Caesar's plaints that he was constrained to describe a burning city without ever having seen one, and his contemptuous retort when Tigellinus offered to burn up Antium, or an artificial wooden city, and finally his invectives against Rome and against the pestilent alleys of the Suburra. Yes, Caesar had ordered the burning of Rome! He alone could give such an order, as Tigellinus alone could carry it out. And if Rome were burning at Caesar's command, who could say whether the populace would not be put to the sword at his command? The monster was fully capable of such a deed. Conflagration; a revolt of the slaves; a slaughter of the citizens! what a hideous chaos! what an unloosening of popular fury and of the forces of destruction! And Lygia was in the midst of it all!

The groans of Vinitius, mingled with the snorting and wheezing of the horse, which scaling the hill towards Aricium, was expending its last breath. Who could rescue her from the burning city? Who could save her? Vinitius, almost lying upon the horse, thrust his fingers into his hair, ready to bite the horse's neck in his agony. Just then, a horseman, riding like a hurricane from the opposite direction, shouted as he passed, "Rome is perishing!" The ears of Vinitius caught but one more word, "Gods." The rest was lost in the clattering of hoofs, but that word sobered him, "Gods!" He raised his head and stretching out his hands towards the star-strewn Heavens, ejaculated: "I call not to ye whose temples are burning, but to Thee. Thou hast known suffering! Thou alone art merciful! Thou alone canst understand human suffering! Thou didst come into the world to teach mercy to man! Show mercy now! If Thou art such as Peter and Paul describe, rescue my Lygia! Take her in Thy hands and carry her out of the flames! Thou canst do it! Restore her to me and I will give Thee my blood! If Thou wilt not do this for my sake, do it for hers! She believes in Thee; she loves Thee! Thou promisest life and happiness after death, but happiness after death will endure, and yet is she willing to die! Take her in Thy hands and carry her out of Rome! Thou canst do it! Is it possible that Thou wilt not?" He paused, for he felt that further prayer might change into menace. He was afraid of offending God at the very moment when he most needed His pity and mercy. The very possibility terrified him. To banish all rebellious ideas, he once more applied the whip to his horse, all the more eagerly that the white walls of Aricium, marking one-half of the journey to Rome, were now shining before him, lit by the rays of the moon. A moment later he had passed in full speed the Temple of Mercury, which stood in the grove before the city. It was evident that news of the disaster had already reached here, for there was strange excitement before the gates. In passing, Vinitius noticed throngs of men on the steps

and between the columns, bearing torches and imploring the protection of the deity. Tho road was no longer deserted and free, as it had been beyond Ardea. Though the crowds were hastening to the grove through the by-ways, none the less the main road was filled with a multitude who gave way before the hurrying horseman. Voices were borne to him from the city. Vinitius burst through like a hurricane, trampling upon the people who stood in his way. Shouts went up from all sides: "Rome is burning! The city is on fire! Ye gods! save Rome!" The horse stumbled and fell, but, reined back by the strong hand of the rider, it sat up on its haunches in front of the tavern where Vinitius had another steed in relay. Slaves awaited their master's commands before the tavern, and at his bidding hastened to bring on a fresh horse.

Vinitius seeing a detachment of ten of the pretorian cavalry, evidently bearing news from the city to Antium, sprang towards them with eager questioning. "What part of the city is on fire?"

"Who art thou?" asked the leader.

"Vinitius, a military Tribune; an Augustale. Answer me on thy head."

"Master, the fire broke out by the Circus Maximus. When we were sent out, the centre of the city was already in flames."

"And the Trans-Tiber?"

"The flames have not yet reached there, but with irresistible force, it is attacking the newer quarters. People are perishing from heat and smoke, and no rescue is possible."

A fresh horse was now led out. Vinitius jumped upon it and hurried along. He directed his course towards Albanum, leaving Alba Longa and her beautiful lake on his right. The road from Aricium now led up the hill, which shut out the horizon from sight, as well as Albanum, situated on the other side. Vinitius was aware that when he reached the summit he would see not only Bovila and Ostranium, where a fresh relay of

horses were awaiting him, but Rome itself. For beyond Albanum, on both sides of the Appian Way, extended the low Campania, along which ran only the arcades of the aqueducts, so that the city would no longer be hidden from sight.

"From the summit I shall see the flames," he said to himself. Again he applied the whip. Before he reached the top, however, he felt the wind in his face, and the odor of smoke in his nostrils. Suddenly a golden gleam lit up the hill-top before him.

"'Tis the reflection of the fire," he thought. The night had already paled. The dawn had deepened into daybreak. On all the near mountains shone golden and rosy gleams which might come either from the conflagration or from the rising sun. When at last he reached the summit, a terrible spectacle burst upon his sight. The entire lowland was covered with smoke, as if a gigantic cloud overlay the earth. It engulfed the towns, the aqueducts, the villas, the trees. And beyond this ghastly mass of gray loomed the burning city. The fire did not take on the aspect of a column of fire, as it does when a single great building is burning, but rather that of a long belt resembling the dawn. Above that belt, rose waveringly a billow of smoke, black in some spots, rosy in others, blood-colored in others, writhing like a snake which first draws back and then shoots upward. The monstrous billow seemed at times to cover even that belt of fire, so that it narrowed itself into a tape line, but at times it lightened it up from beneath, and its lower convolutions changed into waves of flame. Both the belt and the tape line extended from one side of the horizon to the other, shutting it out at times as a belt of forests might shut it out. The Sabine Hills were utterly lost to view.

Vinitius's first thought was that not only the city but the whole world was on fire, and that no human being could be rescued from this ocean of flame and smoke. The wind now blew still stronger from the fire, spread-

ing the smell of burning matter, and the mist which had begun to envelop even the nearest objects.

Daylight had come bright and clear. The sun lit up the crests of the hills around the Alban Lake, but its golden rays shone with a pale and sickly red through the mist. Nearing Albanum, Vinitius rode into smoke still denser and more impenetrable. The town itself was completely engulfed. The terrified citizens crowded into the streets. It was awesome to think what Rome must be like when in Albanum it was almost impossible to breathe. Fresh despair seized upon Vinitius. Fear raised the hair on his head. He sought to comfort himself as best he could. "'Tis impossible," he thought, "that the whole city can be in flames. The wind, blowing from the north, drives the smoke hitherwards. There is none on the other side. The Trans-Tiber, divided by the river, may be entirely safe. In any case, Ursus has but to take Lygia through the Janiculum gate to save both. Equally impossible is it that the whole population should perish, and that the world-ruling city should be swept away with all its inhabitants. In cities that have been stormed, when slaughter and fire are doing their worst, some few of the inhabitiants always escape. Why then should Lygia perish? May God protect her—He who conquered death Himself!"

Again he began to pray, and, according to the custom in which he had been reared, he made vows to Christ of offerings and sacrifices.

When he had passed Albanum where most of the inhabitants swarmed on roofs and trees for a better view of the conflagration, his unrest in a measure subsided. It flashed across his mind that Lygia was protected not merely by Ursus and Linus but by Peter the Apostle. This was an added solace. Peter, to him, was a mysterious and almost supernatural being. From the time that he had first heard him in Ostranium, a strange feeling had possessed him. Of this he had written to Lygia when in Antium. Paul's every word he believed

was true and would be proved true. The closer his acquaintance had grown with the Apostle during his sickness, the more this impression had deepened, until at last it had become unshakable faith. So since Peter had blessed his love and promised Lygia to him, Lygia could not perish in the flames. The city might burn, but not a spark would fall upon her garments. Under the spell of sleeplessness, of his mad riding, and wild emotions, Vinitius now felt a strange exaltation. Everything seemed possible in this mood. Peter would make the sign of the cross over the flames, would part them by a word, and he and they would pass through unhurt. Moreover, the future was known to Peter. Doubtless he had foreseen the calamity, and had warned the Christians and led them forth from the city. Lygia, whom he loved as his own child, could not fail to be among the saved. A firmer hope invaded his heart. Were they fleeing from the city, he might find them in Boliva or meet them on the way. At any moment the beloved face might emerge from the smoke which was spreading still wider over the whole Campania. This seemed the more probable since now he began to meet still more people who, leaving the city, had sought the Albanian mountains in order to escape from the fire and the smoke. Ere yet he had reached Ostranium, he was compelled to slacken his pace, because of the obstructions in the way. There were pedestrians laden with goods, horses with packs, mules and chariots laden with household effects, and litters in which slaves conveyed the richer citizens. Ostranium was so crowded by the fugitives from Rome that he found it difficult to pass through them. On the forum, under the columns of the temple, and in the streets were vast swarms. Here and there rose tents wherein whole families had sought shelter. Others camped under the open sky, shouting invocations to the gods, or cursing fate. In the general panic it was difficult to obtain any information. The men whom Vinitius addressed either made no reply, or cried out with fright-crazed eyes that the city and the world were perish-

ing. Every moment brought fresh crowds of men, women and children from the direction of Rome. These increased the uproar. Some who had lost their dear ones in the crowds were desperately searching for them. Others fought for a camping place. Crowds of savage herdsmen from the Campania rushed onwards to the town, urged by curiosity, or the hope of plunder, made possible by the confusion. Already had the slaves and gladiators begun to plunder the houses and villas in the town, fighting with the soldiers who had been summoned to the defense of the citizens. From Junius, a Senator, whom Vinitius found at the tavern, surrounded by a crowd of Batavian slaves, he obtained the first consecutive story of the conflagration. The fire, it seemed, had begun where the Circus Maximus bordered upon the Palatine, and the Coelian Hills, but had spread out with overwhelming velocity, until it had conquered the entire centre of the city. Never since the conquest of Brennus had such a disaster befallen Rome.

"The entire circus," said Junius, "has gone up in flames, together with the adjacent stores and houses. The Aventine and the Coelian Hill are on fire. The flames from the Palatine have reached the Carinae," and Junius, who possessed a magnificent palace on the Carinae, groaned aloud.

Vinitius shook him by the shoulder. "I also have a house on the Carinae," he said, "but when everything is perishing, let that perish, too."

Then he recalled the advice he had given to Lygia, to go to the house of the Auli, and, fearing she might have followed it, he asked: "How about the Patrician quarter?"

"'Tis in flames," replied Junius.

"And the Trans-Tiber?"

Junius cast on him a look of amazement. "Why shouldst thou care for the Trans-Tiber?" he asked, pressing his aching temples with his hands.

"The Trans-Tiber is more important to me than the whole of Rome!" exclaimed Vinitius, furiously.

"Thou canst reach it only through the Portuan Road, for the heat on the Aventine would suffocate thee. The Trans-Tiber? I know not. The flames had not yet reached it when I left; whether they have reached it now, the gods alone can tell." Junius hesitated for a while, then continued in a low voice: "I know that thou wilt not betray me, so I will say to thee that this is no common fire. We were not allowed to save the Circus. I heard for myself. When the surrounding houses began to burn, thousands of voices shouted, "Death to the rescuers!" Men ran through the city and threw burning torches into the houses. Therefore, the people grow unruly and clamor that the city is burning by Caesar's decree. I will say no more. Woe to the city, woe to us all, and woe to me! What is happening there, no tongue can say. Men are perishing in the flames, or slaying one another in the confusion. 'Tis the end of Rome." And again he fell to wailing, "Woe to the city, and woe to all of us!"

Vinitius leaped on his horse and hastened on by the Appian Way. He now found that his difficulty was to force a passage through the torrent of men and vehicles pouring out from the city. That city extended before him as on an outstretched palm, enclosed in a monstrous conflagration. From the sea of fire and smoke darted an awful heat. The clamors of human beings could not drown the hissing and the roaring of the flames.

CHAPTER XXI

As Vinitius drew nearer he saw that it was more easy to reach Rome than to get inside of the walls. He could scarcely force a way through the Appian Road because of the struggling multitudes. In the Temple of Mars, situated just at the Appian Gate, the throng broke through the doors to find shelter for the night. In the cemeteries the larger tombs had all been seized, after

severe fighting, often accompanied with bloodshed. The disorder in Ostranium gave but a mild foretaste of what was happening under the walls of the city itself. All regard for authority, for rank, for family ties, for differences of class, had ceased to exist. Slaves were seen cudgeling citizens. Gladiators, intoxicated with the wine they had plundered in the Emporium, gathered in large crowds, and with wild cries ran through the square, chasing the people, tramping upon them, robbing them. A number of barbarians exposed for sale in the city had fled from the booths of their vendors. The conflagration and destruction of the city were for them the end of slavery and the hour of vengeance. While the citizens who had lost all their property in the fire were lifting supplicating hands to the gods, these slaves, with howls of joy, fell upon them, dispersed the crowds, tore the clothing from the shoulders of the people, and carried off the younger women. Slaves who had served long years in Rome, tramps with no clothing save woolen rags on their loins, terrible figures from the alleys who were rarely seen on the streets in daytime, and whose very existence would have been unsuspected, joined in these acts of violence. Among them were Asians, Africans, Greeks, Thracians, Germans, and Britons, shouting in all the languages of the earth, wild and dissolute, maddened with the thought that the hour had come when they could repay themselves for years of suffering and misery. Amid that awful crowd, in the glare of the sun and of the fire, glittered the helmets of the pretorians, whose protection was sought by the more peaceful citizens, and who were forced into frequent hand-to-hand conflicts with the bestialized hordes. Vinitius had seen many cities stormed, but never had he witnessed a spectacle where despair, fear, pain, groans, barbaric joy, madness, rage and license had mingled together in so monstrous a chaos. Above this weltering, maddened, human crowd, roared the fire, blazing on the hill-tops of the greatest city in the world, scattering confusion over it with its fiery breath, and enveloping it in smoke, which

shut out the blue of the heaven. The young Tribune, putting forth his utmost strength, risking his life at every moment, at last gained the Appian Gate. He found, however, that he could not reach the City through the quarter of the Porta Capena, because of the crowd and of the heat which beyond the gate made the whole air tremble. At that time the bridge at the Trigenia Gate, opposite to the temple of Bona Dea, had not been built. To cross the Tiber, one had to force his way to the Sublicius Bridge, or, in other words, to pass around the Aventine, through a part of the city which was now one sea of flames. This was impossible. Vinitius saw that he must return towards Ostranium, turn from the Appian Way, cross the river below the city, and reach the Via Portuensis, which led directly to the Trans-Tiber. This was no easy task, on account of the still greater uproar on the Appian Way. He could only cut a passage with his sword, but he was unarmed. He had left Antium from Caesar's Villa, at the first news of the fire.

At the fountain of Mercury, however, he recognized a centurion of the pretorians, who, at the head of a few score men was defending the approaches to the grounds of the Temple. Vinitius ordered him to ride behind him. Recognizing a Tribune and an Augustale, the centurion dared not disobey. Vinitius himself took command of the detachment. Forgetting for the moment Paul's precept of love for one's neighbor, he cut and slashed through the crowd with murderous effect. Curses and stones were hurled at him as he pressed onward to the less obstructed spots. His advance was slow. The people would not yield, but with angry oaths reviled Caesar and the pretorians. In some places the crowd assumed the defensive. Vinitius's ears were assailed by accusations that Nero had set fire to the city. Open threats of death to Caesar and to Poppaea were uttered. Shouts of "Mountebank!" "Actor!" "Matricide!" came from all sides. Some cried that he ought to be dragged down to the Tiber, others that Rome had

shown enough forbearance. These threats might at any moment merge into open riot. Only a leader was needed. Meanwhile the mob's rage turned in despair against the pretorians, who could not extricate themselves from the crowd, because the road was obstructed by huge piles of goods rescued from the conflagration, cases and barrels of provisions, the more costly furniture and utensils, children's cradles, beds, wagons and litters. Here and there hand-to-hand conflicts broke out. At last the pretorians vanquished the unarmed mob and hurled them back. Overcoming all obstacles along the Latin, Numitian, Ardean, Lavinian and Ostian roads, passing on the way gardens, villas, temples and cemeteries, Vinitius reached the village called Vicus Alexandri. Here he crossed the Tiber. There was more space now and less smoke, but there was no lack of fugitives even here. From them he learned that only a few alleys of the Trans-Tiber had been invaded by the fire, but that in these nothing could escape. Burning torches had been purposely hurled into the houses which their bearers allowed no one to extinguish, for they shouted that they were acting under orders. The young Tribune had no doubt that it was Caesar who had given the orders, and the vengeance clamored for by the crowds seemed to him right and just. What worse had ever been done by Mithridates or the most fiendish enemies of Rome? The measure was more than filled. Nero's madness had grown too monstrous. The security of human life was impossible while he lived. Vinitius believed that Nero's hour had struck, that the falling ruins of the city should overwhelm the Mountebank and all his crimes. A man brave enough to place himself at the head of that desperate mob might bring this about at once. Daring thoughts crowded upon Vinitius. Suppose he should be that man? His family, which up to recent times had counted a series of Consuls, was renowned in Rome. The mob needed but a man. Nay, once before, because of a death sentence inflicted upon the four hundred slaves of the Prefect Pedanius, Rome had barely escaped riot

and civil war. What might not happen to-day in the face of that terrible disaster, surpassing all disasters inflicted upon Rome for eight centuries? Whoever summoned the Quirites to arms, thought Vinitius, would certainly overthrow Nero and clothe himself with the purple. Why should he not do so? Not one of all the Augustales was stronger, bolder or younger. True, Nero commanded thirty legions stationed on the frontiers of the Empire. But would not those very legions and their commander rise at the news of the burning of Rome and of its Temple? Then he, Vinitius, might become Caesar. Whispers were current among the Augustales that a soothsayer had predicted that Otho would wear the purple. Was he Otho's inferior? Christ himself might help him with his divine power. Perhaps this very inspiration came from Him. Would it were so! said Vinitius to himself. He would avenge himself on Nero for the peril into which Lygia had been thrown, and for his own sufferings. He would introduce the reign of justice and truth, would spread the creed of Christ from the Euphrates to the mist-enveloped coasts of Britain and would clothe Lygia in purple and make her the mistress of the earth. These thoughts, bursting in his head like sparks from a burning house, died like sparks.

The first thing to do was to rescue Lygia. He could now view the conflagration from close quarters. New fear seized him. In the face of that sea of fire and smoke, in the face of the terrible reality, the hope that Peter the Apostle would save Lygia died away in his heart. Depair fell upon him once more when he reached the Via Portuensis, which led straight to the Trans-Tiber. Not till he arrived at the gate did he recover himself. Here he learned again, what the fugitives had already told him, that the greater part of the quarter had not yet been reached by the flames, though in some few places they had already crossed the river. Nevertheless, the Trans-Tiber was full of smoke and fleeing crowds. The streets were more impassable than ever,

because the people, having more time, bore out and rescued more of their property. The main street was choked up; around the Naumachia great piles were stacked. The narrower alleys, choked with denser smoke, were entirely inaccessible. The inhabitants were fleeing by the thousands. Terrible sights met his eyes. More than once two human columns, flowing from opposite directions, and meeting in a narrow passage, crushed together and fought to the death. Members of the same family lost one another in the tumult. Mothers called despairingly for their children. Vinitius shuddered at the thought of what might be going on nearer to the fire. Amid the noise and the confusion, it was difficult to ask questions or to hear the replies. Rolling across the river came new billows of smoke, so black and heavy that they followed one another along the ground, covering houses, people, everything with the darkness of night. And then again, the wind from the conflagration would disperse them, and Vinitius would move further towards the alley where stood the house of Linus. The sultry warmth of July, increased by the heat from the burning quarters, became unbearable. Eyes smarted from the smoke, breath failed in human breasts. Even the inhabitants who, hoping that the flames would not cross the river, remained in their houses, now began to leave them. Every hour the crowd augmented. The pretorians following Vinitius lagged behind. Some one in the crowd wounded his horse with a hammer. It threw up its bloody head, reared and refused further obedience. His rich tunic betrayed the Augustale. Shouts arose of "Death to Nero and his incendiaries!" 'Twas a moment of fearful peril, for hundreds of hands were raised against Vinitius, but his affrighted horse carried him away, trampling the crowds on all sides. And now came a new billow of black smoke, filling the street with darkness. Vinitius, seeing that further progress was impossible, leaped to the ground and continued his flight afoot, gliding by the walls and anon waiting till the pursuing crowd had passed him. He said to himself that

his efforts were all in vain. Lygia might already be out of the city, might already have saved herself by flight. Easier were it to find a pin on the seashore than her in this tumult and chaos. Even at the price of his life, however, he determined to reach the house of Linus. At times he stopped and rubbed his eyes. With a piece torn from his tunic he covered his nose and his lips and ran on. As he neared the river the heat grew more intense. Knowing that the fire had begun at the Circus Maximus, his first thought was that the heat came from its burning débris, or from the ox market, or from Velabrum. Their proximity to the circus would make them all a ready prey to the flames.

But now he could hardly stand the heat. A fugitive, an old man on crutches, the last whom Vinitius noticed, shouted as he passed, "go thou not to the bridge of Cestius." In truth, further self-deception was impossible. At the turn towards the Jewish quarter, where stood the house of Linus, the young Tribune saw fire shooting from clouds of smoke. Not only was the island burning, but the Trans-Tiber also, or at least the further end of the alley in which Lygia lived. And now he recalled that the house of Linus stood in the middle of a garden. Between the garden and the Tiber was an open clearing. This thought comforted him. The fire would be halted at the clearing. He ran on, though every blast of wind now enveloped him not merely in smoke, but thousands of sparks which might reach the other end of the alley and cut off his retreat. At last, through the smoky curtain he caught sight of the cypresses in the garden of Linus. The houses beyond the clearing were burning like piles of wood, but the little "island" of Linus stood as yet untouched. Vinitius cast his grateful eyes to heaven and leaped forward, though the very air was burning. The door was shut; he pushed it open and rushed in. Not a soul was in the garden. The house seemed equally deserted. "They may have fainted from the smoke and the heat," thought Vinitius, and he began to call "Lygia, Lygia!" Silence was his only reply. In

that silence naught could be heard save the roar of the distant conflagration.

"Lygia!"

Suddenly his ears were struck by the ominous sounds which once before he had heard in this garden. The menagerie on the neigboring island, near the Temple of Aesculapius, had evidently caught fire. Here lions and beasts of all kinds roared out their affright. Vinitius shivered from head to foot. For a second time, when all his thoughts were occupied with Lygia, these awful voices had sounded in his ears, as a presage of misfortune, as a strange omen of future woe. The impression was only momentary. The roar of the fire, more terrible than that of the beasts, forced him to turn his thoughts elsewhere. Lygia had not yet answered his calls, but she might have swooned away in the threatened building or have been overcome by the smoke. Vinitius rushed inside. The little hall was empty and dark with smoke. Feeling for the doors which led to the sleeping room he perceived the light of a torch, and springing thither saw a sanctuary where, instead of heathen statues, was a cross. Beneath the cross burned the torch. The first thought of the young convert was that the cross had sent him the torch to aid him in his search. He seized it and looked around for the sleeping rooms. Finding one he lifted the curtain and peeped in.

The room was empty. Vinitius, however, was certain that he had discovered Lygia's bed chamber, because her garments hung along the wall on nails and on the bed lay a capitium, a close garment worn by women next to the skin. Vinitius grasped the garment and pressed it to his lips. Then throwing it over his shoulder he continued his search. The house was small, so that in a short time he went through every room and even descended into the cellar. Search as he would, he found no one. It was only too evident that Lygia, Linus and Ursus, with other inhabitants of the quarter, had sought safety in flight. "I must look for them in the crowds, beyond the gates of the city," thought Vinitius.

It had not greatly surprised him that he had not met them on the Portuensis road, for they might have gone out from the Trans-Tiber from the opposite side, in the direction of the Vatican Hill. In any case they had escaped destruction from the fire. Vinitius was greatly relieved. He appreciated, it is true, the terrible dangers that they had escaped. But the thought of the superhuman strength of Ursus was a comfort to him. "I must flee from here," he said to himself, "across the gardens of Domitius into the gardens of Agrippina. I will surely find them there. I need not fear the smoke there, because the wind is blowing from the Sabine Hill."

The pressing moment had now come when he was forced to think of his own safety. Waves of flame were coming nearer and nearer from the direction of the island and clouds of smoke almost entirely enveloped the alley. The torch which had lighted his way was extinguished by a gust of wind. Rushing into the street, Vinitius ran at full speed towards the Via Portuensis in the direction whence he had come. The flames seemed to pursue him with their fiery breath, now enveloping him in fresh clouds of smoke, now pouring sparks upon him, which fell on his hair, neck and clothing. His tunic began to burn in spots, but he paid no attention to this and rushed on lest the smoke should suffocate him. His mouth was choked with soot, his throat and lungs seemed on fire. The blood rushed to his head. At times everything about him seemed red, even the smoke itself. He thought "this is a living fire. Mayhap it is better that I should throw myself down and perish." His efforts exhausted him more and more. His head, neck and shoulders streamed with perspiration, which scalded him like boiling water. Had it not been for Lygia's name, which he repeated mentally, and for her garment, which he had bound across his mouth, he would have fallen to the ground. A few moments later he could no longer recognize the streets through which he ran. Gradually he lost consciousness, remembering only that he must rush onward, for in the open field Lygia was awaiting him, whom Peter, the Apos-

tle, had promised to him. Suddenly he was seized by a strange conviction, half feverish, like a vision before death, that he must see her, wed her, and then expire. On and on he ran, staggering like a drunken man from one side of the street to the other. Suddenly a change came over the terrible conflagration sweeping over the city. Places which had been merely smouldering burst forth into one great sea of flame. The wind no longer bore smoke along with it. The smoke which had already accumulated vanished in a mad eddy of heated air. But now came myriads of sparks, so that it seemed to Vinitius as if he were running through a cloud of fire. However, he could see ahead of him clearer than before, and just as he was ready to fall with exhaustion he beheld the end of the street. This sight gave him new courage and strength. Passing the corner he found himself in the street which led to the Via Portuensis and the Codetan Field. The sparks ceased to pursue him. He knew that if he could reach the Via Portuensis he would be safe, even if he fell in a faint. At the end of the street he saw a cloud which veiled the exit. "If that is smoke," thought he, "I cannot pass through it." He gathered up all his strength and rushed onward. As he ran he threw away his tunic, which had caught fire from the sparks, and was burning like the shirt of Nessus, and he ran onward naked save for the garment wound about his head and over his mouth. As he approached the cloud he perceived that what he had taken for smoke was only dust, from the midst of which came the sound of human voices and cries.

"The mob is pillaging the houses," said Vinitius to himself, but he ran in the direction of the voices. In any case, people were there who might give him help. In this hope he shouted for help at the top of his voice. But this was his last effort; lurid lights danced before his eyes, the breath left his lungs, strength failed him and he fell.

He was overheard, however, or rather some people saw him. Two men ran to his assistance with gourds full

of water. Vinitius, exhausted though he was, had not lost consciousness. He seized a gourd with both hands and eagerly drank its contents. "Thanks," said he, "please help me to my feet. I can walk on unaided."

The other workman poured water on his head, then the two raised him from the ground and carried him to their fellows, who immediately surrounded him, and questioned him as to whether he had suffered any serious hurt. Their solicitude astonished Vinitius. "Good people, who are you?"

"We are pulling down the buildings so that the fire may not reach the Via Portuensis," answered one of the toilers.

"You aided me when I had fallen; I thank you."

"We are not allowed to refuse help," answered a chorus of voices. Vinitius, who all the morning had seen brutal crowds plundering and murdering, now looked more attentively at the faces around him and said:

"May Christ reward you."

"Praised be His Name," exclaimed a chorus of voices.

"What of Linus?" inquired Vinitius.

But he was unable to finish the question or hear the answer, for he fainted from emotion and from his fearful exertion. He came to himself only in the Codetan Field, in a garden, surrounded by a crowd of men and women. The first words which he uttered were:

"Where is Linus?"

There was a pause, and then a voice known to Vinitius said:

"He went out by the Nomentan Gate two days ago. Peace be with thee, Oh, King of Persia."

Vinitius raised himself to a sitting posture and beheld Chilo before him.

"Thy house, O Lord," said the Greek, "must have been destroyed, for the Carinae are in flames, but thou wilt always be as rich as Midas. Oh, what a misfortune! The Christians, Oh, son of Serapis, long ago foretold that fire would destroy the city, but Linus, with the

daughter of Jove, is in Ostranium. Oh, what a disaster to this city!"

Vinitius grew faint again.

"Hast thou seen them?" he asked.

"I saw them, O Lord. Praise be to Christ and all the gods, that I can repay thy favors with good news. But Osiris, I will repay thee more, I swear by this burning Rome."

The shades of evening had fallen, but it was light as day in the garden, for the conflagration had increased. It seemed now that not more sections of the city were burning, but that the entire city was enveloped in flames. The heavens were red as far as the eye could see, and a red light closed down upon the world.

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

THE flames of the burning city illuminated the sky as far as the eye could reach. The full moon, rising behind the hills, took on the hue of molten brass, from the glare which pervaded the atmosphere, and seemed to be staring with bewildered wonder at the perishing conqueror of the world. Rose-colored stars glittered in the rosy deeps of the firmament. But, reversing the conditions of the normal night, the earth was brighter than the sky. Rome, like a gigantic funeral pyre, lit up the whole Campania. The blood-colored light fell upon far-away mountains, cities, villas, temples and monuments. On the aqueducts, which extended from the neighboring mountains into the city, were crowds of people, swarming thither for safety or for a vantage point whereon to gaze upon the conflagration.

Fresh districts of the city were being lapped up by tongues of fire. That criminal hands were adding fuel to the flames was evident from the fact that they broke out here and there far from their original centre. From the seven hills whereon Rome was founded flowed billows of fire into the dense settlements in the valley—into five and six story houses, full of shops and booths, into movable wooden amphitheatres built for all sorts of public diversion, into storehouses for olives, wood, grain, nuts, and pine-cones whose seeds were eaten by the poor, and into storehouses filled with clothing which the generosity of Caesar periodically distributed among the starving rabble that huddled into the narrow alleys. Here the fire, finding inflammable materials ready to hand, became a series of explosions. Whole streets were licked up

with astonishing avidity. Spectators who were encamped outside the city or who stood upon the aqueducts could determine by the color of the flames what it was they had lit upon. The furious strength of the wind tore out from the burning abyss thousands, nay millions, of burning walnut and almond shells which shot upward into the sky like brilliant butterflies, to burst with a crackling report, or to be driven into the remotest parts of the city, or upon the aqueducts, or the fields in the outlying country. All hopes of staying the conflagration had been abandoned. The confusion increased with every moment. On one side the fleeing population poured out of the city gates, while on the other the peasants and villagers and semi-savage shepherds of the Campania came rushing Romeward, lured by hopes of plunder.

Here, there, and everywhere, rose the cry, "Rome is perishing!" The expected destruction of the city relaxed all law, and all the bonds that had knit the population into an integer.

What recked the mob, consisting largely of slaves and aliens, for the sovereignty of Rome? The ruin of the city could but free them, they exulted in it with wild menaces. Robbery and rapine hovered in the air. The sight of the burning city stayed the hand of the mob for the moment, but an outbreak of slaughter might begin whenever Rome had fallen. Hundreds of thousands of slaves, oblivious of the fact that Rome was not merely a locality but the master of legions all over the world, awaited but a signal and a leader. The name of Spartacus flew from mouth to mouth. But Spartacus was dead. Citizens mustered together and seized such arms as they could find. At all the gates monstrous rumors gained credence. Some asserted that Vulcan, at the command of Jupiter, was hurling destruction from the bowels of the earth, others, that Vesta was avenging Rubria. Men who thought thus made no effort to save anything from the wreck but flocked to the temples, and besought the mercy of the gods. The most general belief was that Nero had ordered the burning of Rome to rid it of the

stenches that arose from the Suburra and to erect upon its ruins a new city which he would call Neroia. Madness seized upon the populace at this thought. Had a leader but taken advantage of that ebullition of feeling, as Vinitius feared he might, Nero's hour would have struck many years sooner than it actually did.

It was rumored also that Caesar had gone insane, that he had ordered an indiscriminate slaughter of the people by pretorians and gladiators. Others again swore by the gods that the wild beasts of the menageries were to be let loose at the command of Bronzebeard. Lions with burning manes, elephants and bisons, crazed with fear, had been seen hurling themselves upon the struggling crowds of men and women. Nor was this without some foundation in truth. In some places elephants, scenting the approaching danger, had burst the barriers of their pens, and had crashed through the streets in a direction opposite to that of the fire, carrying destruction with them in their flight. It was estimated that tens of thousands of citizens had already perished. In fact, this was no exaggeration. Many, distracted by the loss of property or dear ones, had cast themselves despairing into the flames. Others were suffocated by the smoke. In the centre of the city, with the Capitol on one side, the Quirinal, the Viminal and the Esquiline on the other and also between the Palatine and the Coelian Hills, where the streets were most densely thronged, the flames burst out simultaneously in so many places that people fleeing this way or that, cast themselves unexpectedly upon a new wall of fire and perished miserably in a flood of flame.

Distracted, bewildered, terror-stricken, the people knew not which way to turn. The streets were piled up with goods and chattels. Some of the narrower ones were hopelessly blocked. Refugees who found their way to the squares and markets—near the place where subsequently arose the Flavian Amphitheatre, near the Temple of the Earth, near the Portico of Silvia, or, higher yet, near the temples of Juno and Lucinia, between the Clivus Vibrius and the old Esquiline Gate, succumbed to the

awful heat. Places where the flames could not reach were afterwards found to be choked up with hundreds of charred bodies. Some of the victims had sought vainly to shield themselves beneath slabs of paving stones which they had torn up from the streets. Not a family in that portion of the city escaped without the loss of some members. All along the walls, and at the gates, and on the highways outside went up the wails of women calling vainly on the names of dear ones who had been burned or trampled to death.

Thus, while some supplicated heaven, others blasphemed the gods, holding them responsible for this awful disaster. To the temple of Jupiter Liberator streamed old men who cried with outstretched arms: "If Thou be a Liberator, save Thy altars and save the city." But the wrath of the mob was turned chiefly against the ancient Roman deities, whom they held to be especially charged with the destinies of the city. They had failed in the hour of need, hence insults were their only portion. On the Via Asinaria a procession of Egyptian priests happened to be carrying the statue of Isis, which they had rescued from the temple near the Coelimontane Gate. The mob scattered the priests, seized the chariot, drew it to the Appian Gate, and placed the statue in the Temple of Mars, beating back the priests of that deity who sought to restrain them. The names of Serapis, Baal, and Jehovah were invoked. The adherents of these alien gods swarmed out of the alleys near the Suburra and the Trans-Tiber, filling the fields outside the walls with their cries and wails. A triumphant note was sometimes heard above the clamor, while some of the populace joined in a chorus glorifying the Lord of the world, others were incensed and sought to repress them by violence. Hymns floated upwards from some places,—sung by men in the prime of life, by old men, by women and children—marvellous and solemn hymns whose meaning they could not grasp, but in which arose continually the refrain: "Behold the Judge cometh in the day of wrath and disaster!" Thus the burning city was enveloped by

billows of unquiet, wakeful beings, like a tempest-tossed sea. Neither despair nor blasphemy, nor hymn, however, was of any avail. The catastrophe seemed to be as irresistible, as complete, and as pitiless as predestination itself. Stores of hemp caught fire around Pompey's Amphitheatre, together with ropes and all variety of machines used in the circuses and arenas. Then followed barrels of pitch used for smearing the ropes, which were stored away in adjoining buildings. Soon the entire city on the hither side of the Campus Martius was so brilliantly lighted by yellow flames that it almost seemed to the half-crazed spectators as though the order of day and night had been reversed so that they were gazing upon sunshine. But in the end a hideous bloody gleam extinguished all other colors. Enormous fountains and pillars of flame shot up to the fiery heavens from that fiery sea; their tops spread out into branches and feathers; these the winds bore away, changing them into golden threads, or hairs, or sparks, and sweeping them onward over the Campania towards the Alban Hills. The night grew brighter. The air seemed pervaded not only with light but with heat. The Tiber flowed on, a river of flame. The city had become a pandemonium. The conflagration spread wider and wider; stormed the hills, flooded the level places, submerged the valleys, raged, roared and thundered.

CHAPTER II

Vinitius had been taken to the house of Macrinus, a weaver, who washed him and supplied him with food and clothing. The young Tribune soon felt his strength returning. He determined to set out that very night on a further search for Linus. Macrinus, who was a Christian, corroborated Chilo's statement that Linus had gone with the High Priest Clement to Ostranium. Here the Apostle Peter was to baptize a number of converts. It

was known to Christians in that section of the city that two days previous Linus had entrusted the care of his house to a man called Gaius. To Vinitius this was an assurance that neither Lygia nor Ursus had remained in the house, but had also gone to Ostranium.

His mind was much relieved. As Linus was an old man, too old to walk every day from the Trans-Tiber to the far-off Nomentan gate and back again, it was almost certain that he had lodged for the past few days with one or more of the Christians encamped outside the walls. Lygia and Ursus must have been with him. Hence they had escaped the fire, which had scarcely touched the other slope of the Esquiline. In all this Vinitius saw a special dispensation of Christ, who had watched over him. Love stronger than ever filled his heart. He vowed that he would repay those marks of favor by the devotion of his whole life.

But all the more anxious did he become to reach Ostranium to find Lygia, to find Linus and Peter. He would take them away with him to some of his estates, if necessary to Sicily. Rome is burning! A few days more and it would be a heap of ashes. Why should he stay in the midst of such disaster and among a frenzied rabble? On his estates were troops of willing slaves adequate for protection. His friends would be surrounded by the quiet of the country and live in peace under Christ's wing and the blessing of Peter. If he could only find them!

But that was no easy task. Vinitius recalled the difficulty with which he had journeyed from the Appian Way to the Trans-Tiber, the time wasted in circling around to reach the Via Portuensis. He decided that this time he would go around the city in the opposite direction. Through the Triumphal Way it was possible to reach the Aemilian Bridge by going along the river, then passing the Pincian Hill, along the Campus Martius, and by the gardens of Pompey, Lucullus and Sallust, and finally pushing forward to the Via Nomentana. But, although this was the shortest route, both Macrinus and Chilo ad-

vised him not to take it. True, the fire had not reached that part of the city, but it was more than likely that all the market squares and the streets would be blockaded by people and furniture. Chilo counselled him to go through the Ager Vaticanus to the Flaminian Gate, cross the river at that point, and push on outside the walls beyond the gardens of Acilius to the Salarian Gate. Vinitius, after some thought, accepted the advice.

Macrinus had to remain behind to look after his house. He procured two mules, one of which might pass to Lygia in case she were found. He would have added a slave, but Vinitius demurred, as he expected that the first detachment of pretorians whom he met on the way would pass under his command.

Chilo and the young Tribune set out through the Pagus Janiculensis to the Triumphal Way. There, too, were encampments of all sorts in the open spaces. They found the less difficulty in pushing through them, that most of the inhabitants had now fled through the Via Portuensis in the direction of the sea. Beyond the Gate of Septimus they rode between the river and the magnificent gardens of Domitia, whose huge cypresses were reddened by the glow of the fire as by a sunset. The road became freer. Here and there they found nothing to impede their progress, save the cityward flow of eager rustics. Vinitius urged his mule onward. Chilo, following in the rear, kept muttering to himself.

"So we have left the fire behind, but it is burning our shoulders. Never was seen so great a light upon this road after nightfall. Oh, Zeus, unless thou sendest a rainstorm to quench that fire thou hast no love for Rome! The power of man will not suffice. And such a city—a city before which Greece and the whole world bowed submission! And now the first Greek who happens along may roast his beans in its ashes. Who would have ever expected this? There will be no more Rome, nor Roman patricians! When its ashes grow cold, whoso wills may walk over them, and whistle over them, and whistle without danger. Ye gods! To think of whis-

tling over a city that ruled the world. No Greek nor barbarian would have dared to hope for this. Yet now they may whistle, for ashes, whether those of a herdsman's fire or of a burned city, are only ashes, to be blown away by the wind as it listeth."

He turned round and gazed at the waste of flames. A malicious joy was in his eyes.

"'Tis perishing!" he cried. "'Tis perishing off the face of the earth. Whither will the world now send its grain, its olive oil, its money? What tyrant will squeeze gold and tears out of it? Fire cannot consume marble, but it crumbles it into dust. The Capitol will be ruins, the Palatine will be ruins. Oh, Zeus! Rome was a shepherd and the other nations were the sheep. If the shepherd were hungry, he slew a sheep, ate the flesh, and offered the skin to thee, oh, father of the gods. Who, oh, Cloud-compeller, will now do the slaying? Into whose hands wilt thou place the shepherd's crook? Rome is burning even as though thou hadst struck it with a thunderbolt."

"Make haste!" cried Vinitius, "why loiterest thou?"

"Master, I am weeping over Rome, the city of Jupiter."

They rode on in silence. The roaring flames were behind them, the whirring of birds' wings around them. Doves, from their multitudinous nests in the villas and the small towns of the Campania, seabirds from the shore, field birds from the interior, evidently mistaking the glare of the fire for sunlight, were flying in flocks to the scene of the conflagration. Vinitius was the first to break the silence.

"Where wert thou when the fire broke out?"

"Master, I was on my way to my friend Euritius, a shop-keeper near the Circus Maximus. I was pondering over the teachings of Christ when the cry of 'Fire' arose. Crowds flocked to the circus, some for rescue, some through curiosity, but when the flames surrounded the circus itself and broke out in other places, each had to look out for himself."

"And didst thou see people throwing torches into houses?"

"What have I not seen, O grandson of Aeneas? I saw people fighting their way through the crowds with drawn swords. I have seen pitched battles. I have seen the entrails of men and women scattered on the pavement. Thou wouldst have thought the barbarians had captured the city and were putting it to the sword. People cried out that the end of the world had come. Some lost their heads, and, forgetting to flee, waited stupidly for the flames to devour them. Some were bewildered, some howled in very despair, some again howled for joy. Master, there be wicked folk who know not the true worth of your beneficent rule, nor of those just laws whereby ye are enabled to take from others and give to yourselves. These folk cannot submit to the will of God."

Vinitius, pre-occupied with his own thoughts, did not notice the irony in Chilo's words. A shudder ran through him at the thought that Lygia might be in the midst of that weltering chaos, in those terrible streets, whose pavements reeked with human entrails. Though ten times, at least, he had asked of Chilo all he knew, he once more turned to him.

"Didst thou see them with thine own eyes in Ostranium?"

"Verily I did, O son of Venus! I saw the maiden, the worthy Lygian, the saintly Linus and Apostle Peter."

"Before the fire broke out?"

"Before the fire broke out, O Mithra!"

Vinitius could not suppress a doubt that the old man was lying. Reining in his mule, he asked, with threatening brow:

"What wert thou doing there?"

The question embarrassed Chilo. Like many others, he thought that the destruction of Rome meant the destruction of the Roman Empire. But face to face with Vinitius, at that moment, he remembered that the young Tribune had forbidden him, under the pain of some ter-

rible penalty, to watch the Christians, and especially Linus and Lygia.

"Master," he replied, "wherefore wilt thou not believe that I love thee? I was in Ostranium because I am already half a Christian. Pyrrho hath taught me esteem for virtue rather than for philosophy. More and more do I cleave to godly people. And I am poor. Many a time, O Jove, when thou wert at Antium I have starved over my studies. Therefore, I sat on the walls of Ostranium, for the Christians, poor though they be, distribute more alms than all the rest of the Romans."

Vinitius was softened by this plausible answer.

"Knowest thou not," he asked, in a milder tone, "where Linus dwelleth at present?"

"Once thou didst punish me severely for curiosity."

Vinitius rode on in silence.

"Master," said Chilo, after a period, "but for me thou wouldst never have found the maiden. And now if again we find her, thou wilt not forget the needy philosopher?"

"I will give thee a house with a vineyard at Ameriola."

"I thank thee, O Hercules! With a vineyard? I thank thee! Yea, verily, a house with a vineyard!"

They had now reached the Vatican Hill, gleaming ruddy red from the fire. Gaining the Naumachia, they turned to the right, so that they might pass the Vatican Field to the river, and crossing that reach the Flaminian Gate. Suddenly Chilo reined in his mule.

"Master," he said, "I have an idea."

"Speak!" commanded Vinitius.

"Midway between the Janiculum and the Vatican, just beyond Agrippina's gardens, are quarries whence were taken stones and sand to build the Circus of Nero. Hearken, master! The Jews, who as thou knowest abound in the Trans-Tiber, have begun cruel persecutions of the Christians. Thou rememberest in the time of the god-like Claudius there were disturbances which forced Caesar to banish the Jews from Rome. But now that they have returned, and feel safe under the protection of the Augusta, they have waxed bolder in

their attacks upon the Christians. I know this! I myself have witnessed it. True, no edict has been issued against the Christians. But the Jews defame them to the prefect of the city, accusing them of murdering infants, of worshipping an ass, of preaching a religion not approved by the Senate. Likewise they waylay them or attack them in their houses of prayer with such ferocity that the Christians are obliged to hide away."

"Well, what art thou coming to?"

"Master, to this. Though the synagogues stand openly in the Trans-Tiber, the Christians, fleeing from persecution, can pray only in secret, and assemble in deserted sheds outside the walls, or in sand-pits. The Christians of the Trans-Tiber chose the quarry whence excavations were made for the building of the circus, and various houses along the river front. Now, while Rome is burning, doubtless the Christians are praying. We shall find a multitude of them in the quarry. Let us go thither along the road."

"But," was Vinitius's impatient retort, "thou hast told me that Linus went to Ostranium."

"Thou hast promised me a house with a vineyard in Ameriola. Therefore would I seek the maiden wheresoever there is a chance of finding her. Who knows if they did not return to the Trans-Tiber after the fire? They may have gone around the city even as we are doing. Linus has a house. Perchance he wished to approach it in order to learn whether the fire had reached that portion of the city. If they have returned, I swear to thee by Persephone that they are now engaged in prayer at the quarry. If not we shall obtain tidings of them."

"Thou art right. Lead on!" said the Tribune.

Without a moment's hesitation Chilo turned to the left towards the hill. As they passed it they lost sight of burning Rome. All the neighboring heights were lit up with the glow. They themselves were in the shade. Passing the Circus, they still kept on to the left. At last they came in sight of a dark passage. Through that

darkness Vinitius beheld the gleam of many lanterns.

"Here they are," said Chilo. "There will be more today than ever, for their other houses of prayer are either burned down or filled with smoke, as is every house in the Trans-Tiber."

"Hark!" said Vinitius. "I hear singing."

And, in fact, voices were wafted to them from the dark opening. Into that opening lanterns disappeared one after the other. But from all sides new lantern-bearers appeared. In a short time Vinitius and Chilo found themselves part of a multitude, all streaming toward the opening.

Chilo leaped from his mule and beckoned to a youth.

"I am a priest and a bishop," he said. "Hold our mules, and thou wilt receive my blessing and the remittance of thy sins."

Without waiting for an answer, he thrust the reins into the lad's hands. Then with Vinitius he joined the moving throngs.

Reaching the quarry, they pushed through the dark passage by the aid of their dark lanterns, until they arrived at a large cave, evidently formed by the recent removal of stone, for the encircling walls all looked freshly cut.

Here it was somewhat brighter than in the passage. Burning torches assisted the rays of lanterns and tapers, and enabled Vinitius to discern a kneeling congregation with uplifted hands. He did not see Lygia, nor the Apostle Peter, nor Linus. All around him were solemn and expectant faces. Fear was depicted on some, hope on others. The light glowed on the whites of their raised eyes, perspiration trickled down their chalky foreheads. Some sang hymns, others feverishly repeated the name of Christ, others beat their breasts. All were evidently awaiting some important and imminent development.

The hymn had now ceased. Above the congregation, in a niche made by the removal of a stone, appeared Vinitius's old acquaintance, Crispus, his face pale and set as

with fanatic enthusiasm. All eyes turned to him with eager expectation. He began by blessing the assembly. Then, raising his voice almost to a shout, he poured out a torrent of words.

"Repent ye your sins! The hour has come! Lo! the Lord hath sent down devouring flames upon Babylon, the city of crime and debauchery. The hour of judgment has struck, the hour of wrath, the hour of universal calamity. The Lord hath promised to return. Soon shall ye see Him. He will come not as the Lamb whose blood was offered up for your sins, but as a terrible Judge who in his justice will cast sinners and infidels into the pit. Woe then to the world! Woe to the sinners! There will be no mercy for them. Lo! I see Thee, Christ! Showers of stars are falling to the earth, the sun is darkened, abysses yawn in the earth, the dead rise from their graves, but Thou art moving amid the sound of trumpets and legions of angels, amid thunders and lightnings. I see Thee, I hear Thee, oh, Christ!"

Here he was silent. Lifting up his face, he seemed to espy something distant and terrible. At that moment a muffled rumble was heard from underground. Once, twice, a tenth time. Whole streets of burning houses collapsed with a crash. But the greater number of the Christians took these noises as tokens that the terrible hour was at hand. For a belief in the second advent of Christ and the end of the world was common among them. Now the conflagration of the city confirmed that belief. Terror of God took hold of the multitude. Here and there voices called out, "Lo! the day of judgment is at hand!" Some of the people covered their faces with their hands, thinking that the earth was about to be shaken to its very foundation and from its fissures hellish monsters would emerge and cast themselves upon the sinners.

Others cried aloud, "Christ have mercy on us! Saviour, have pity!" Some confessed their sins aloud; finally some cast themselves into one another's arms, so

that each might have some one near the heart in the moment of affliction. But there were also some whose faces shone with joy, with smiles of unearthly happiness, and who showed no fear. In some places were heard voices. These were from people who in their religious exaltation uttered strange words in unknown tongues. There was one in a dark corner who called out, "Awake, oh, thou that sleepest!" Above all that commotion the voice of Crispus was heard, "Beware! beware!" At times there was silence when all held their breath. They seemed expectant of some coming event. Simultaneously was heard the distant thunder of falling houses. The groans, prayers, cries and shouts were renewed, "Oh, Saviour, have mercy!" Then Crispus lifted up his voice and cried:

"Cast away all earthly goods. Soon there will not be earth enough beneath your feet for standing room. Cast away all earthly love, for God will destroy those who value above Him wife or child. Woe to him who loves the creature more than the Creator. Woe to the strong, woe to the oppressors, woe to the libertines, woe to men, women, and children!"

A noise now arose, louder than any that had yet shaken the quarry. All fell to the ground, stretching out their arms crosswise as a protection against the evil spirit. A hush ensued. Nothing was heard save heavy breathing interspersed with awed whispers of "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" and now and then the crying of children. Above that dark mass arose a voice crying, "Peace be with you!" 'Twas the voice of Peter the Apostle, who had just entered the crypt. All fear passed away at that sound as passes a sudden terror from a flock of sheep at sight of the shepherd. The multitude rose to their feet. Approaching, they surrounded him, as though seeking shelter under his wings. He stretched his hands out above them and cried:

"Why are ye disturbed in mind? Who amongst ye can foretell the future? God hath smitten Babylon with

fire but forget not that blood of the Lamb hath redeemed ye, and that His loving kindness will enable ye to die with His name on your lips."

After the stern and stormful outburst of Crispus, the words of Peter fell like balm upon the congregation. Instead of God's wrath it was God's love which he held up before them. The hearers realized that it was the Christ whom they had learned to love through the teachings of the Apostles, therefore no pitiless judge, but a sweet and patient lamb, whose loving kindness a hundredfold exceeded the wickedness of man.

Calm descended upon all hearts, and a feeling of gratitude towards the Apostle. Voices called from all sides, "We are thy sheep; feed us!" Those who were closest cried, "Do not leave us, in the days of our trouble."

They fell at his knees. At this Vinitius approached, threw aside the edge of his cloak, bent his head, and said:

"Master, save me! I have searched for her in the flames, in the smoke, and among the people, and I have found her nowhere. But I believe that thou canst give her back to me."

Peter laid his hand upon the young man's head.

"Have faith!" he said, "and come with me."

CHAPTER III

The city continued burning. The Circus Maximus fell in ruins. In the section where the fire had started, whole alleys and streets had also fallen. After each fall pillars of flame shot up toward the sky. The wind now changed, and blew a gale from the sea, bearing down waves of flame and brands and cinders upon the Coelian, the Esquiline and the Viminal. The authorities were now providing means of rescue. At the order of Tigellinus, who three days before had hurried in from Antium, they pulled down the houses on the Esquiline, in order

that the fire might die by itself on reaching the empty spaces. 'Twas a vain attempt undertaken only to preserve a remnant of the city, since that part which was already in flames was hopelessly doomed. It was necessary, however, to prevent the further spreading of the calamity. At one swoop incalculable wealth had perished in Rome. Most of the inhabitants had lost their all. Hundreds of thousands wandered about around the walls in utter destitution. As early as the second day hunger began to torment the multitude. The immense stores of provisions amassed within the city had all been consumed. In this wholesale chaos, amid the dissolution of all authority, every one thought only of providing himself with new supplies. Immediately after the arrival of Tigellinus suitable orders were dispatched to Ostia. But the people, in the meantime, assumed a more menacing attitude.

The house at the Aqua Appia, where Tigellinus lived, was surrounded by crowds of women who clamored from morning till late in the night for "Bread and roof." The pretorians who were brought from the great camp situated between the Via Salaria and the Nomentana strove in vain to maintain order. Here and there the people stood in open-armed resistance. Elsewhere, defenseless groups pointed to the blazing city and implored, "Kill us in sight of this fire!" They cursed Caesar, his courtiers and the pretorian soldiers. The tumult increased every hour, so that Tigellinus, gazing at night on thousands of fires spread around the city, said to himself that they were the fires of hostile camps. Besides flour, as large a quantity as possible of baked bread was brought at his command, not only from Ostia but from all the surrounding towns and villages. But when the first convoy reached the Emporium at night, the people stormed the chief gate leading towards the Aventine and seized the supplies in the twinkling of an eye. Then followed a terrible uproar. In the light of the flames the mob struggled for loaves. Many were trampled upon. Flour from torn sacks covered as with snow the whole

space from the cornhouse to the arches of Drusus and Germanicus. The tumult lasted till the soldiers surrounded the buildings and dispersed the mob with the help of arrows and darts.

Never since the invasion of the Gauls under Brennus had Rome experienced a like disaster. In their despair the mob compared the two conflagrations. In the first there had remained, at least, the Capitol. But, now, the Capitol was surrounded by a terrible wreath of flame. Marble, it is true, could not burn, yet at night, when the wind turned the smoke aside for a moment one could see rows of columns of the lofty sanctuary of Jove, red and glowing like burning coal. Again, in the time of Brennus, Rome had a patriotic and harmonious people, attached to the city and their altars. Now, mobs of various tongues roamed about the walls of the burning city, mostly composed of bond and freedmen, unmanageable, unruly, and ready under pressure of want to turn against Caesar and the city.

The very magnitude of the catastrophe, filling as it did every heart with dismay, disarmed the crowd to a certain extent. After the scourge of fire would follow famine and disease. The terrible hot days of July had set in. It was impossible to inhale air heated by fire and sun.

Night not only brought no relief, but made a hell of the city. In the daytime a dismaying and ill-omened sight was before them. The very centre of the gigantic city upon the hills changed into a roaring volcano. Round about as far as the Albanian Hills was an immense encampment, composed of booths, tents, huts, wagons, wheelbarrows, packs of merchandise, fire-places, covered with smoke and dust. These were lighted by the beams of the sun which, owing to the smoke, shed a red and weird light on the whole, full as it was of noise, din, threats, hatred and terror. A monstrous crowd of men, women and children held possession. Among the Quirites were Greeks, hairy blue-eyed and light-haired people from the North, Africans and Asiatics. Among the citizens were slaves, freedmen, gladiators, merchants,

tradesmen, peasants and soldiers, a veritable sea of humanity surrounding an island of fire.

Various rumors stirred this sea, just as the wind raises waves in the real one. Some were favorable and others unfavorable. It was reported that immense stores of food and clothing were on their way from the Emporium to be distributed gratis. It was also said that at the command of Caesar, provinces in Asia and Africa would be stripped of their wealth, and the wealth thus raised would be divided among the inhabitants of Rome, so that everybody might build his own house. But it was also noised about that the water in the aqueducts was poisoned, and that Nero intended to destroy the city and annihilate all the inhabitants, so that he might move to Greece or Egypt and rule the world from there. Each report spread with lightning-like speed. Each was received by the rabble as a fact. So these various reports produced outbursts of hope, indignation, terror and rage. Finally these encamping thousands were attacked as by a fever. The Christian belief, that the end of the world by fire was at hand, spread itself even among the followers of the gods, and increased daily. Some people were stupefied, others went mad. In the midst of the clouds, lighted by the flames, they saw gods looking down on the ruin of the world. Some stretched out their hands in supplication to them, while others cursed them. Meanwhile the soldiers assisted by a number of citizens continued to destroy houses on the Esquiline and the Coelian, and also on the Trans-Tiber. Important parts of these quarters were saved. But in the city perished the accumulations of ages of conquest, priceless works of art, magnificent sanctuaries, the most precious reminders of Rome's past and of her glory. One could foresee that of the whole city there would scarcely remain a few houses on the margin and that hundreds of thousands of people would remain without shelter. A report spread that the soldiers were tearing down the houses, not to stop the fire, but to make sure that nothing was left of the city. Tigellinus implored Caesar in every letter to

return so that by his presence the exasperated people might be calmed. But Caesar did not move until his own palace was on fire, and then hastened back so as not to miss the period when the fire should reach its maximum.

CHAPTER IV

Meanwhile the fire had reached the Via Nomentana. A sudden change of the wind caused the flames to turn towards the Via Lata and the Tiber. They surrounded the Capitol and spread to the Ox Market, destroying everything omitted in their first attack, and again approached the Palatine. Tigellinus gathered all the pretorian forces together and despatched courier after courier to the approaching Caesar notifying him that he would miss nothing of the great spectacle, since the conflagration was increasing. But Nero elected to arrive during the night, so that he might have a better view, and sate himself with the sight of the perishing city. With that object he halted near the Aqua Albana. Then he invited the tragedian Aliturus to his tent, and with his help decided how to pose, look, and express himself. He learned appropriate gestures and argued with the actor as to the words "Oh sacred city which seemed to be more lasting than Ida," whether he should raise both hands or hold a lyre in one hand and lift up only the other. This matter seemed to him at that time of more moment than anything else. He started at last about nightfall. He sought counsel from Petronius as to the verses which were to be dedicated to the conflagration. Might he insert blasphemy against the gods? From an artistic point of view would not these expressions have been spontaneously uttered by any man in like position who was losing his fatherland?

About midnight he and his splendid court, composed of whole detachments of nobility, senators, knights, freedmen, slaves, women and children, approached the city.

Sixteen thousand pretorians were posted along the roadside in battle array, to guard the safety and peace of his journey and keep the excited people at a distance. The people cursed, shouted, and hissed as they caught sight of the retinue, but did not venture to attack them. In many places, however, the mob applauded. But they were mainly those who had lost nothing, since they had nothing to lose in the fire. They hoped for a more liberal distribution of grain, olives, clothing, and money. At last the shouting and whistling were drowned in the din of the trumpets and horns which Tigellinus ordered to be sounded. When Nero arrived at the Ostian gate he halted and said: "Oh, houseless ruler of a homeless people, where shall I lay my unfortunate head to-night?"

After passing the Clivus Delphini he ascended the steps prepared for him on the Appian Aqueduct. He was followed by the Augustales and a choir of singers bearing lutes and other musical instruments.

All held their breath awaiting the expression of some great word, which for their own safety they would be bound to remember. But Nero remained solemn and silent, clothed in a purple cloak with a wreath of golden laurels on his head, looking at the raging of the mighty flames. When Terpnos handed him a golden lute, he lifted his eyes towards the flame-illumined city, as though waiting for inspiration.

The people pointed at him from a distance as he stood in the blood-like light. Fiery serpents hissed in the distance. The oldest and holiest monuments were in flames. The sacred temple of Hercules built by Evander; the temple of Jupiter Stator; the temple of Luna, built by Servius Tullius; the house of Numa Pompilius, and the sanctuary of Vesta with the penates of the Roman people, were all on fire. Through the waving flames the Capitol was discerned at intervals. The past, the soul of Rome was burning. But Caesar stood, lute in hand, his features set like those of a tragedian, careless of the destruction of his country, but anxious about the posture of his body and the pathetic words

by which he might describe the great calamity, stir the most admiration, and receive the most applause.

He hated the city. He detested its inhabitants. He only loved his songs and his verses. He heartily rejoiced that at last he beheld a tragedy not unlike that of which he was writing. The maker of verses felt himself happy; the declaimer felt himself inspired. The seeker for emotions was jubilant at the appalling sight, and thought, with delight, that the destruction of Troy was nothing compared with that of this great city. What more could he wish? There lay Rome. Rome the ruler of the world was in flames, whilst he was standing on the arches of the aqueduct, with a golden lute in his hands, showily clad in purple, admired by all, stately and poetic. Somewhere, below there in the darkness, the people murmured and grumbled. Let them murmur. Ages would pass, thousands of years would go by, and men would remember and glorify the poet who in such a night sang the fall and burning of Troy. What was Homer, yea, what was Apollo, with his lute? None could be compared to him. Here he raised his hands and striking the strings he quoted the words of Priam:

"O nest of my fathers, O precious cradle!"

His voice in the open air, against the roar of the flames and the distant murmur of the multitude, seemed weak, abrupt, and feeble. The sound of the accompanying instruments was like the buzzing of flies. But senators, officers, and Augustales gathered together on the aqueduct, bowed their heads and listened in rapturous silence. He sang long and his subject gradually became sadder. At intervals, when he stopped to catch breath, the chorus of singers repeated the last verse, then Nero would throw the tragic robe from his shoulders, and, assuming a tragic gesture which he learned from Aliturus, would strike the lute and continue his song. When at last he finished his composition he began to improvise, seeking great comparisons in the sight before him. His face changed. In reality he was not moved by the destruction of his Capitol, but his delight over his own words caused his eyes

to fill with tears. He dropped the lute with a clatter at his feet, and wrapping himself in his robe stood as if petrified, like one of those statues of Niobe which adorn the court of the Palatine. A storm of applause succeeded. But the multitude in the distance answered it by howling. Now there could no longer be a doubt that Caesar had ordered the burning of the city, so as to provide himself with a spectacle which might move him to song. When Nero heard the cry of hundreds of thousands of voices, he turned to the Augustales with a sad smile such as men wear when suffering from injustice, and said:

"That is the way that the Quirites value poetry and myself."

"Knaves!" answered Vatinius. "Lord, command the pretorians to fall on them."

Nero turned to Tigellinus:

"Can I count upon the faithfulness of the soldiers?"

"Yes, O divine one!" replied the prefect.

But Petronius shrugged his shoulders.

"On their loyalty you can count, but not on their numbers. Remain for the present where you are, for this is the safest place. But the people must needs be pacified."

Seneca and the consul Licinius were of the same opinion. Meantime the discontent below was increasing. The people armed themselves with stones, tent-poles, with boards from the wagons and wheelbarrows, and pieces of iron. In due time some of the chiefs of the pretorian soldiers arrived. They reported that the cohorts, pressed by the mob, retained their line of battle with much difficulty, and as they had no orders to attack, they knew not what to do.

"Gods!" said Nero, "what a night." On one side was the conflagration, on the other the tumultuous sea of the mob. He began to look for more poetic expressions, so that he could describe the peril of the moment. But seeing around him pale faces and disturbed looks he began to share their fears. "Give me the dark cloak with the hood," he called out. "Must we really resort to battle,

Lord?" hesitatingly replied Tigellinus. "I have done everything that I could, but the danger is threatening. Speak, thou Lord, to the people and make them ample promises."

"Must Caesar himself address the mob? Let somebody else talk to them in my name. Who will undertake this?"

"I," said Petronius calmly.

"Go, friend! thou art my most loyal friend in need. Go, and be prodigal in thy promises."

Petronius turned to the retinue with a sarcastic glance.

"Senators here present," he cried, "and also Piso, Nerva, and Senecio, come with me."

Then he stepped gently down the aqueduct. Those whom he had summoned went with him, not without hesitation, but with a certain hope with which his calmness had inspired them. Petronius stopped at the foot of the Arcades and ordered a white horse to be brought to him. He mounted it and, followed by his companions, proceeded between the deep ranks of the pretorians towards the surging black mass of people. He was unarmed, save only for a light ivory cane which he habitually carried. He advanced and pushed his horse into the midst of the crowd. All around in the light of the conflagration, one could see hands lifted up, armed with all kinds of weapons, inflamed eyes, perspiring faces. Roaring and foaming like madly surging waves the masses surrounded him and his followers. On every side was a sea of heads, moving, pushing, a dreadful scene. The shouts of indignation increased and changed into unearthly roaring. Poles, pitch-forks, even swords were brandished above Petronius. Eager hands were stretched towards his horse's bridle and himself, but he kept riding on deeper into the midst of the crowd; cool, self-possessed and contemptuous, at times he struck the most audacious on their heads with his cane, as though he were opening a road for himself through an ordinary throng. His self-possession, his calmness, dumb-

founded the tumultuous mob. At last they recognized him, and numerous voices greeted him.

"Petronius! The Arbiter of Elegance! Petronius! Petronius!" sounded from every direction. At the repetition of that name, the crowd became less turbulent, the faces less agitated, for that brilliant, splendid patrician, though not seeking popular favor, was, nevertheless, beloved. He passed as a munificent friend of the people. His popularity had increased since the affair of Pedanius Secundus, when he pleaded for the mitigation of the ruthless edict condemning all the slaves of that prefect to death. Especially did all the slaves feel a boundless affection for him. They loved him as the unfortunate are wont to love those who show them but the smallest favors. Apart from this they were eager to hear Caesar's message. Nobody doubted that Caesar had specially commissioned him.

He removed his white, scarlet-bordered toga, and waved it over his head, a signal that he desired to speak.

"Silence! Silence!" shouted voices on all sides.

In a moment the mob was quieted. Then he straightened himself on his horse and spoke in a calm and collected voice:

"Citizens! Let those who hear me repeat my word to those who stand at a distance. All of you behave like men, and not like beasts in the arena."

"We listen! We listen!"

"Then hear me. The city will be rebuilt. The gardens of Lucullus, Maecenas, Caesar, and Agrippina will be opened to you. To-morrow the distribution of grain, wine, and olives will begin, so that everybody may fill his belly up to his throat. After this Caesar will prepare games for you such as the world has never seen. After his banquets and gifts await you. You will be richer after the fire than before."

He was answered by murmurs which spread from the centre to all directions, as waves spread when a stone is cast in the water. Those who were near repeated the

words to those at a distance, but here and there were shouts of anger and applause, which finally turned into a universal cry, "Bread and games!"

Petronius wrapped himself up in the toga and for some time listened motionless. In his white apparel he resembled a marble statue. The noise from all sides increased in volume so that it drowned the roaring of the conflagration. But the ambassador evidently had something more to say, for he waited. At last, once more with upraised hands, he commanded silence and cried:

"I promise you bread and games. Now cheer in honor of the Caesar who feeds and clothes you. Go to sleep, ye ragamuffins, for dawn is at hand."

So saying, he turned his horse, touched lightly with his cane upon the heads and faces of those who stood in his way, and slowly proceeded to the pretorian lines.

Soon he arrived under the aqueduct. Above there was something like a panic. The shouting of the crowd for bread and games had reached Caesar. He imagined that a new outbreak had taken place, and did not expect Petronius back in safety. So when he saw him he hastened to the steps to meet him. Pale-faced and full of emotion, he asked:

"How goes it? What are they doing? Is fighting begun there?"

Petronius drew a long breath, and replied:

"By Pollux! they sweat and produce bad odors. Let somebody give me epilimna, for I am fainting."

Then he turned to Caesar.

"I promised them," he said, "grain, olives, the opening of the gardens, and games. They worship the arena, and they are bellowing in thy behalf. Gods! what a disagreeable odor these plebeians emit!"

"I had the pretorians ready," cried Tigellinus, "and if thou hadst not quieted them, the shouters would have been silenced forever. 'Tis a pity, Caesar, that thou didst not allow me to use force."

Petronius looked at the speaker, shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"This chance is not yet lost. Thou mayest be able to use it to-morrow."

"No, no!" cried Caesar. "I shall order the gardens to be opened to them, and grain to be distributed. Thanks to thee, Petronius. I shall prepare games and that song which I sang before thee to-day, I will sing in public."

This said, he placed his hands on Petronius's shoulder, and remained silent for a while. Then starting up, he inquired:

"Tell me candidly, how did I appear when I was singing?"

"Thou wert worthy of the scene as the scene was worthy of thee," answered Petronius.

Then Nero turned to the fire:

"Let us gaze at it yet again," he said, "and bid farewell to old Rome."

CHAPTER V

The words of the Apostle inspired the Christians with fresh hope. The end of the world seemed to them always at hand. Yet they now began to realize that the terrible final judgment had been postponed, and that the first thing that would happen would be the end of Nero, whose reign they considered as that of Antichrist, and whose crimes cried to God for vengeance. Thus strengthened in their hearts, they dispersed after the prayer and departed to their temporary habitations, and even to the Trans-Tiber. News had reached them that the conflagration, set there in some twenty places, had turned again with a change of the wind towards the river side, and after consuming here and there what it could, had ceased to spread.

The Apostle also left the quarry. Vinitius and Chilo followed them. The young Tribune did not venture to interrupt him in his prayers, so he walked on in silence. Only with his eyes he begged mercy. His disquiet made him tremble. But many came to kiss Peter's hands and

the hem of the Apostle's garment. Mothers held up their children to him. Men knelt in the dark, long passage, holding up tapers and begging a blessing. Others went alongside singing, so that there was no appropriate moment either for question or for answer. It was so in the narrow passage. Only when they came out in the open spaces whence the burning city could be seen, the Apostle blessed them thrice, and turning to Vinitius said: "Be not afraid. Near this place is the hut of the quarryman, in which we shall find Lygia and Linus and her faithful servant. Christ who predestined her for thee hath preserved her for thee."

Vinitius tottered and supported himself by putting his hand against the rock. The ride from Antium, the events at the wall, the search for Lygia among the burning houses, the sleepless nights and the frequent alarms, all these had almost exhausted his strength. But the news that the most precious one in the world was near at hand entirely unnerved him. He became so feeble that he threw himself speechless at the Apostle's feet, and embraced his knees.

The Apostle, waving away all thanks and honor, said: "Not to me but to Christ."

"Yea, an admirable Deity!" said the voice of Chilo from the rear. "But I do not know what to do with the mules that are waiting here for me."

"Rise and come with me," said Peter, taking the young man by the hand.

Vinitius rose. By the light of the flames tears were seen to trickle down his pale face; his lips moved as though he were praying.

"Let us go," he said.

But Chilo once more repeated, "Master, what shall I do with the mules that are waiting? This worthy prophet probably prefers riding to walking."

Vinitius himself did not know what to answer, but hearing from Peter that the hut of the quarryman was near, he exclaimed:

"Lead the mules to Macrinus."

"Excuse me, sir, if I remind you of the house in Ameriola. In the shadow of this horrible conflagration it is quite natural to forget such trifling things."

"Thou wilt get it."

"Oh, grandson of Numa Pompilius! I was always sure of it, but now hearing the promise and knowing that this magnanimous Apostle has also heard it, I shall not even remind thee that thou hast promised me a vineyard. Peace be with you. I shall find thee, Master. Peace be with ye."

Peter and Vinitius replied:

"And with thee."

Both turned to the right toward the hills. Whilst on the road, Vinitius said:

"Master, wash me with the water of baptism, so that I may call myself a true confessor of Christ, for I love Him with all my soul. Wash me at once for I am ready in my heart, and whatever thou commandest me I will do. Only tell me what to do, and I will do it."

"Love thy neighbor as thyself," answered the Apostle, "for only with love canst thou serve Him."

"Yes, I already understand and feel it. When I was a child, I believed in the Roman gods, albeit I did not love them. But this God I love so much that I would gladly give my life for Him."

He looked towards the sky and repeated with ecstasy:

"For He is one; for He only is good and gracious, therefore not only will He save this city, but the whole world. Him alone will I acknowledge, Him will I recognize."

"And He will bless thee and thine," concluded the Apostle. Meanwhile, they turned into another passage, at the end of which a faint light was visible.

Peter pointed to it and said:

"That is the dwelling place of the quarryman who sheltered us when we were on the way returning from Ostranium with the sick Linus. We could not then go to the other side of the Tiber."

In a few minutes they arrived. The hovel was more

like a cave formed in the slope of the hill. On the outside it had a wall made of clay and reeds. The door was closed, but through an opening, which served for a window, the interior was discerned, lighted by a fire. A dark giant figure rose to meet them, and inquired:

"Who are ye?"

"Servants of Christ," Peter replied. "Peace be with thee, Ursus."

Ursus bowed down to the Apostle's feet. Recognizing Vinitius, he grasped his hand by the wrist, and lifted it up to his lips.

"And thou, master," he said. "Blessed be the name of the Lamb for the gladness thou wilt cause to Callina."

He opened the door and they entered. Linus was lying on a bundle of straw. His face was emaciated, and his brow as yellow as ivory. Sitting at the fireside was Lygia, holding in her hand a bunch of small fishes fastened on a string, and evidently intended for supper.

She was busy removing the fishes from the string. Thinking it was Ursus who had entered, she did not raise her eyes. But Vinitius came near her, pronounced her name, and stretched out his hand to her. She immediately stood up. A flash of surprise and joy passed over her face, and without a word, as a child, who, after days of trouble and suffering recovers father or mother, she threw herself into his open arms. He embraced her and pressed her to his breast for some time with as much transport as though she had been rescued by a miracle. Then he unfastened his arms and placed her temples between his hands, kissed her brow and her eyes, and embraced her again, repeating her name, then bent to her knees and to her hands, saluted her, adored and worshipped her. His delight was boundless as well as his love and happiness. He told her how he had hastened from Antium, how he had searched for her at the walls and in the smoke in the house of Linus, how great his sufferings were, how much he had endured before the Apostle showed him her hiding place.

"But now," he said, "now that I have found thee, I shall not leave thee near this fire and these raging crowds. People are murdering one another at the walls. Slaves are revolting and pillaging. Only God knows the miseries that are yet to fall on Rome. But I will protect thee and thine, oh, my darling! Come with me to Antium. We shall embark there and sail for Sicily. My land is thy land, my house is thy house. Listen to me. In Sicily we shall find Aulus. I will restore thee to Pomponia, after that I will take thee from her hands. But thou, oh, my most beloved, trust me! I am not yet baptized, but ask Peter if I have not expressed my desire to become a true confessor of Christ, if I did not ask him to baptize me, even in the quarryman's cave. Trust thou in me. All of ye confide in me."

Lygia's face was radiant as she listened to these words.

Christians, first, because of Jewish persecution, and now because of the conflagration and consequent confusion, could only live in uncertainty and alarm. A removal to peaceful Sicily would put an end to all this trouble and open a new epoch of bliss in their lives. Had Vinitius planned to take Lygia alone, she would certainly have resisted the temptation. She was unwilling to leave Peter and Linus. But Vinitius said unto them: "Come with me! My land is your land, my house is your house."

At this Lygia bowed to kiss his hand, as a mark of obedience, saying: "Thy hearth is my hearth."

Then, ashamed that she had spoken words, which, according to Roman custom, were only repeated by wives at the marriage ceremony, she blushed deeply and stood in the light of the fire with head downwards, uncertain whether he would deem her wanting in maidenliness. But in his face beamed boundless adoration. He turned to Peter.

"Rome," he said, "is burning at Caesar's command. He complained at Antium that he had never seen a conflagration. If he shrank not from such a crime as

this, think what may yet come to pass. Who knows if he is not going to mass soldiers in the city and order a general massacre of the inhabitants; who knows what persecution may follow, and who knows whether after the calamity of fire, the calamity of civil war, murder and famine may not follow? Hide yourselves, and let us also hide Lygia. There ye can wait in peace until the tempest passes, and when it is over, return anew to sow the good seed."

From the direction of the Vatican Field, as though to enforce the fears of Vinitius, distant cries now arose, cries of rage and terror. At that moment the owner of the hut entered and hastily shut the door behind him.

"Near the Circus of Nero," he cried, "the people are killing one another. Slaves and gladiators are throwing themselves on the citizens."

"Do you hear that?" asked Vinitius.

"The measure is filled," said the Apostle. "Calamity will follow like an inexhaustible sea."

He turned to Vinitius, and, pointing to Lygia, said: "Take the maiden and save her, together with Linus and Ursus. Let them go with you."

Vinitius, who loved the Apostle with all the might of his soul, exclaimed:

"I swear to thee, master, that I shall not leave thee to perish."

"The Lord bless thee for thy good wishes," answered the Apostle, "but hast thee not heard that Christ when on the lake thrice repeated unto me, "Feed my lambs?"

Vinitius was silent.

"Moreover, if thou who art not responsible for me, declarest that thou wilt not leave me behind to destruction, how canst thou ask that I should abandon my flock in the day of calamity? When we were on the stormy lake, and we were troubled in heart, He did not forsake us. How much more should I, a servant, follow the example of my Master?"

Then Linus raised his emaciated face, and asked:

"And why should I, O representative of the Lord, why should I not follow thy example?"

Vinitius passed his hands over his face, as though wrestling with himself or struggling with his thoughts. Then he grasped Lygia by the hand and said it in a voice in which quivered the energy of the Roman soldier:

"Listen to me, Peter, Linus, and thou, Lygia. I speak according to the dictates of my human reason, but ye have another monitor which recks not for your own safety, but only for the commands of the Saviour. I did not understand this, and I erred, for the scales have not yet been removed from my eyes, and the old Adam is not yet dead within me. But, as I love Christ, and wish to be His servant, it involves a thing which is more important than my life. I kneel here before you, and swear, that I also will fulfill the commandment of love and will not forsake my brethren in the day of calamity."

This said, he knelt down. Then suddenly transported into a state of ecstasy, he raised his eyes and hands and called out:

"Do I understand Thee now, O Christ? Am I worthy of thee?"

His hands trembled, his eyes glistened with tears, his body shook with faith and love. The Apostle Peter took an earthen vessel, full of water, approached him and solemnly said:

"I baptize thee, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Enthusiasm seized on all present. It appeared to them that the house was filled with heavenly light, that they heard unearthly music, that the cliffs in the cave opened above their heads, that throngs of angels floated down from heaven, and that up above, they beheld a cross, and pierced hands giving a blessing.

Meanwhile the riotous shouts and the roar of the flames from the burning city resounded from without.

CHAPTER VI

People camped out in the magnificent gardens of Caesar, in the former gardens of Domitius and Agrippina. On the field of Mars, in the gardens of Pompey, Sallust, and Maecenas, they occupied the porticos, the ball courts, the comfortable summer houses and sheds erected for wild beasts. Peacocks, flamingos, swans, and ostriches, gazelles and antelopes from Africa, stags and deer which served to ornament the gardens, all fell under the knives of the mob. Victuals arrived from Ostium in such abundance that one could walk from one side of the Tiber to the other on a bridge of rafts and boats. Grain sold at the unprecedentedly low price of three sestertia. To the poor it was distributed gratis. Immense stores of wine, olives and chestnuts were brought in. From the mountains sheep and cattle were driven daily into the city. Beggars, who, before the fire hid themselves in the lanes of the Suburra in a starving condition, now lived at their ease. The fear of famine entirely vanished. But it was more difficult to banish murder, robbery and all abuses. A vagrant life insured impunity to malefactors, the more so that they called themselves the admirers of Caesar, lavishing their applause whenever he showed himself. When all authority was suspended, and there was not enough power to keep order in a city inhabited by the scum of the world, crimes were committed surpassing human imagination. Every night there were fights, murders, kidnapping of women and children. At the Porta Mugionis where there was a station for the herds driven in from the Campania, there were daily affrays in which hundreds of people perished. Every morning the banks of the Tiber were covered with corpses which nobody carried away. These decayed quickly because of the heat, intensified by the fire, and filled the atmosphere with foul exhalations.

Sickness broke out in the encampments, and the more timid foresaw a great epidemic.

The city continued to burn. By the sixth day it at last reached the empty space on the Esquiline, where a great number of houses had purposely been demolished. Only then did the flames slacken. But the heaps of burning cinders produced so powerful a light that the people would not believe the calamity was not at an end. And, indeed, on the seventh night, the fire burst out anew in the buildings belonging to Tigellinus. For lack of fuel it lasted only a short time. But burned houses collapsed in all directions, which in their fall threw up towers of flame and pillars of cinders. Slowly the glow from the burning began to darken. The sky after sunset ceased to be illuminated blood red by the flames. Only during the night time there would be seen upon the vast dark waste flickering bluish tongues proceeding from the piles of cinders.

Of the fourteen divisions of Rome there were only four left—including those on the Trans-Tiber. All the others had been destroyed. When the heaps of cinders were at last reduced to ashes, one could see from the Tiber to the Esquiline an immense, gray, dead, and melancholy expanse, upon which stood rows of columns like so many grave stones in a cemetery. Among these columns crowds of gloomy people lurked during the daytime, some searching for valuables, others for the bones of those dear to them. In the night, dogs howled above the ashes and ruins of their former abodes. Caesar's bounty and assistance to the mob did not restrain them from pouring out their wrath in imprecations. Only the scum were contented, the pickpockets, thieves, and homeless beggars, who could eat enough, drink and rob. But people who had lost their near relatives and all their possessions could not be appeased by the opening of gardens nor by distribution of grain, nor by promises of games and gifts. It was a too great and unprecedented calamity. Others, in whom still glimmered a spark of love for their city and fatherland, were reduced to despair

at the news that the old name of Rome was to disappear from the face of the earth, and that Caesar intended to raise upon its ashes, a new city under the name of Neropolis. Murmurs and threats increased daily in spite of the adulations of the Augustales, and the calumnies of Tigellinus. Nero, more impressed than any of the preceding Caesars with the necessity of courting the favor of the populace, saw with alarm, that in the underhand death struggle which he was carrying on against the patricians and the senate, he might lack support. The Augustales, themselves, were not less disturbed, for any morning might bring destruction upon them. Tigellinus thought of drawing several legions from Asia Minor. Vatinius, who was wont to smile even when he was slapped in the face, now lost his sense of humor. Vitelius lost his appetite.

Others had taken counsel among themselves how to avert calamity. It was an open secret that in case of any outbreak which would remove Caesar, with the possible exception of Petronius, not a single Augustale would escape death. Nero's madness was ascribed to their influence, all the crimes he committed to their suggestion. The hatred of them was almost stronger than that towards Nero.

They now sought to find a means of exonerating themselves from the responsibility of the fire. But in clearing themselves it was also necessary to clear Caesar, or nobody would believe that they were not the authors of the calamity.

Tigellinus took counsel on this subject with Domitius Afer, and even with Seneca, whom he detested. Poppaea, too, understood that the ruin of Caesar meant also her own. She had recourse to her confidants, the Jewish priests. For some years it had been noised about that she acknowledged the faith of Jehovah. Nero, himself, found methods frequently terrible and more frequently farcical. He alternately fell into alarm, and into puerile amusements. Above all he kept up a never ceasing out-pouring of complaints.

On a certain time a consultation was held in the house of Tiberius, which had escaped the flames. It was of long duration, but fruitless. Petronius's advice was to leave the seat of troubles and depart for Greece and thence to Egypt and Asia Minor. This voyage had been planned before, why then defer it whilst there was so much sorrow and peril?

Caesar accepted the suggestion eagerly, but Seneca, after a moment of thought, objected.

"It is easy to go, but the subsequent return will be difficult."

"By Hercules!" replied Petronius, "we may return with the Asiatic legions."

"Yea, I will do so," said Caesar.

Tigellinus objected. He could not think of anything himself, and had Petronius's idea came into his head, he would unhesitatingly declare it the safest one. But his chief eagerness was to prevent Petronius from posing as the one man who could be successfully appealed to in an emergency.

"Listen to me, O divine one," he said. "This advice is ruinous. Ere thou canst reach Ostia, civil war will have broken out. Who knows whether one of the still living descendants of the divine Augustus may not proclaim himself Caesar, and what then shall we do if the legions declare for him?"

"This we can do," answered Caesar, "we can see that there be no descendants of Augustus. There are not many of them now, hence it will not be difficult to get rid of them."

"This can be done. But are they the only ones? Only as recently as yesterday, my people heard murmurs in the crowd that Thrasea ought to be Caesar."

Nero bit his lips. After a moment's thought he raised his eyes and said:

"Insatiable and ungrateful! They have plenty of grain, and coal on which they can bake cakes. What more do they want?"

"Vengeance!" exclaimed Tigellinus.

There was silence anew. Suddenly Caesar rose, raised his hand and began to declaim:

"Hearts call for vengeance, and vengeance calls for sacrifice."

Forgetting everything, his face brightened, he called out:

"Hand me a tablet and stylus so that I may write this verse. Lucan could never have composed one like it. Did you notice that I conceived it in the twinkling of an eye?"

"Oh, incomparable one!" cried several voices.

Nero wrote down the verse and said:

"Yes, vengeance wants a victim."

He cast a glance on those who surrounded him.

"Suppose we were to spread the news, that Vatinius commanded the burning of the city, and deliver him to the furious people?"

"O divinity! who am I?" exclaimed Vatinius.

"True, it is needful to have a more important victim. What says Vitelius?"

Vitelius grew pale, but began to laugh.

"My fat," he said, "would be apt to start the fire again."

Nero was thinking of something else. He was mentally searching for a victim who could fully appease the fury of the people, and he found him.

"Tigellinus," he called after a while, "thou hast burned Rome!"

A shiver ran through the people present. They comprehended that this time Caesar was in earnest and that a moment pregnant with events was at hand.

The face of Tigellinus wrinkled up like the jaws of a dog ready to bite.

"I burned Rome at thy command!" he snarled.

They glared at each other like two demons.

A silence followed so deep that the buzzing of flies could be heard through the hall.

"Tigellinus!" said Nero, "dost thou love me?"

"Thou knowest, Lord."

"Offer thyself up for me."

"Divine Caesar," answered Tigellinus. "Why dost thou give me the sweet draught which I cannot drink? The rabble are murmuring and conspiring. Wouldst thou that the pretorians should also rise?"

The implied menace chilled the hearts of all present.

Tigellinus was the prefect of the pretorians. Behind his words lay a threat. Nero himself understood this. His face paled.

While this was going on, Epaphroditus, Caesar's freedman, entered and made known that the divine Augusta wished to see Tigellinus, as she was holding audience with people whom the prefect ought to hear.

Tigellinus bowed to Caesar and left with a calm but contemptuous face. They had wished to strike him and he had shown his teeth. He had given them to understand who he was. Knowing the pusillanimity of Nero, he was sure that the ruler of the world would never dare to lift up his hand against him.

Nero sat for a while in silence. Then seeing that some answer was expected from him, he said:

"I have nourished a serpent in my bosom."

Petronius shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that it was easy to pluck off the head of such a serpent.

"What sayest thou? Speak! advise!" cried Nero, who observed the gesture. "In thee alone I trust, for thou hast more understanding than all of them, and thou lovest me."

Petronius had already on his lips, "Appoint me prefect, and I will deliver Tigellinus to the people and pacify them in a day," but his natural indolence prevailed. To be prefect meant to bear on his shoulders Caesar's person and a thousand public affairs. Why take upon himself such labor? Was it not preferable to read poetry in a spacious library and look on vases and statues, besides holding the divine body of Eunice on his lap, and arranging her golden hair with his fingers, and pressing his mouth to her coral lips?

"Then," he said, "I counsel the journey to Achaea."

"Ah!" replied Nero, "I expected something better from thee. The senate detests me, who will guarantee if I depart, that it will not revolt against me and proclaim some one else Caesar? The people were formerly loyal, but now they will follow the senate. By Hades! I wish that the people and the senate had one head."

"Allow me to tell thee, O divine one, that if thou desirest to preserve Rome, thou must needs preserve a few Romans also," returned Petronius, smilingly.

But Nero renewed his complaints. "What are Rome and the Romans to me? In Achaea I should be obeyed. Here nothing but treason surrounds me, all abandon me. Ye yourselves are getting ready for treason. I know it, I know! You do not even think what future ages will say of you if you forsake such an artist as I am."

He struck his forehead suddenly and cried aloud:

"True! In the midst of these troubles, even I myself had forgotten who I am."

He turned a radiant face upon Petronius.

"Petronius," said he, "the people murmur, but if I take the lute and go with it to the field of Mars, if I sing to them that song which I sang to you at the conflagration, dost thou think that I will not move them with my song as Orpheus once moved wild beasts?"

Tullius Senecio, impatient to return to his slave women, who had just arrived from Antium, now broke in:

"Beyond doubt, Caesar, if they permitted thee to begin."

"Let us go to Greece!" cried Nero, with displeasure.

At that moment Poppaea entered. With her was Tigellinus. The eyes of the people present turned involuntarily to him, for never had a victor entered the Capitol with such pride as his when he stood before Caesar. He began to speak slowly and impressively, his voice sounding like the clang of iron.

"Hear me, O Caesar, for I can tell thee what I have found! The people want vengeance and victims, not one victim but hundreds and thousands.

"Hast thou, O Lord, heard of Christus, who was crucified by Pontius Pilatus. Knowest thou of the Christians? Have I not told thee of their crimes and their abominable customs, of their prophesies that fire would bring about the end of the world? The people hate and suspect them. Nobody has ever seen them in the sanctuaries, for they consider our gods as evil spirits. Thou dost not have them in the circus, for they abominate games and races. Never have the hands of a Christian applauded thee. Never has any one of them recognized thee as a god. They are the enemies of the human race, the enemies of the city and of thee. The people murmur against thee. Thou hast ordered the burning of Rome, not I. The people are thirsting for vengeance. Let them have it. The people are thirsting for blood and games. Let them have them. The people suspect thee. Let their suspicion be averted elsewhere."

Nero at first listened with amazement, but as Tigellinus progressed, his actor's face changed and assumed a look of anger, of sorrow, of sympathy, and of indignation. Suddenly he stood up, threw down his toga, which fell at his feet, raised both hands and remained in that attitude for a while.

At last he exclaimed, in the voice of a tragedian:

"Zeus, Apollo, Hera, Athene, Persephone, and all ye immortal gods, why did ye not come to our assistance? What has this unfortunate city done to those cruel people that they so inhumanly burned it?"

"They are the enemies of mankind and of thee," said Poppaea.

And others began to cry:

"Deliver a sentence! Punish the incendiaries! The very gods cry for vengeance!"

Nero sat down, sank his head on his breast, and was silent again, as though the wickedness he had heard stunned him. But after a little he shook his head and said:

"What punishment and what tortures should be meted out for such a crime? But the gods will inspire me,

Assisted by the power of Tartarus, I will give my poor people such spectacles that for ages they will remember me with gratitude."

The brow of Petronius was suddenly clouded. He thought of the peril hanging over Lygia and Vinitius, whom he loved more than he did the rest of that strange people, whose doctrines he rejected, but of whose innocence he was convinced. He also thought of the bloody orgies which would soon take place, against which his aesthetic sense revolted. But above all he said to himself, "I must save Vinitius, who will go mad if that maiden perishes." This thought outweighed all others. Petronius fully understood that he was attempting something far more perilous than anything he had yet gone through. Nevertheless, he began to speak freely and carelessly, as was his custom when criticizing and ridiculing subjects insufficiently aesthetic with Caesar and the Augustales.

"Now ye have at last found victims! Well, then, ye may send them to the circus or may array them in tunics of torture. But hear me. Ye have authority, ye have pretorians, ye have power. Be therefore candid at least when no one is in hearing distance. Deceive the people, but deceive not yourselves. Give the Christians to the mob. Condemn them to whatever torture you please; but have courage to acknowledge to yourselves that they did not burn Rome. Fie upon you! Ye call me the Arbiter of Elegance. As such I declare to you that I cannot stomach bad comedies. Fie! How all this brings to mind the theatrical booths near the Asses Gate, where actors play the parts of gods and kings to amuse the gaping suburban mobs, and when the play is over, wash their onions down with sour wine or submit to a clubbing. Be ye in reality kings and queens, for ye are entitled to the honor. O Caesar! thou hast warningly held before us the verdict of the future; but remember that the future will also pronounce judgment against thee. By the goddess Clio! Nero, ruler of the world, Nero, a god, burned Rome, for he was as powerful on

earth as Zeus in Olympus. Nero, a poet, loved poetry so much that to it he sacrificed his country! From the beginning of the world nobody ever did the like—no one ever ventured to do the like. I conjure you, in the name of the nine muses, do not renounce such glory, for thy songs will resound to the end of the ages. Compared with thee, what will Priam be? What will Agamemnon be, what Achilles—nay, the very gods themselves? It matters not whether the burning of Rome was a good thing, if it was great and out of the common. For this reason I tell thee that the people will not raise their hands against thee. Have courage. Keep thyself from acts unbecoming to thee; for this only canst thou fear, that future ages will be able to say: 'Nero burned Rome, but, being a pusillanimous Caesar and a small-souled poet, he denied the great act out of fear and cast the guilt on the innocent.'"

The words of Petronius made their wonted powerful impression on Nero. Nevertheless, Petronius was not deceived as to the fact that his speech was a heroic measure. If fortunate, it might save the Christians. But it was more likely to hurl himself to destruction. However, he did not hesitate at any hazard when the matter concerned Vinitius, whom he loved. "The die is cast," he said to himself. "We shall see how far the fear of death outweighs in the ape his love of glory."

In his soul Petronius scarcely dared to doubt that fear would gain the day.

Silence followed his words. Poppaea and all present looked in Nero's eyes as in a rainbow. He pursed up his lips, so that they were drawn up to the very nostrils, as he was accustomed to do whenever he knew not what to say. At last wretchedness and anxiety were visible on his face.

"Lord," cried Tigellinus when he saw this, "permit me to go, for when anyone seeks to expose thy person to destruction, and, besides, calls thee a pusillanimous Caesar, and a small-souled poet, an incendiary, and a comedian, my ears cannot suffer such words."

"I have lost!" thought Petronius. But, turning toward

Tigellinus, he measured him with his eyes, in which shone the contempt natural to a great and elegant personage contemplating a knave. Then he said: "Tigellinus, it was thee I called a comedian, for even now thou art one."

"And wherefore? Because I do not care to listen to thy reproaches?"

"It is because thou art now professing boundless love for Caesar, yet a moment ago thou didst threaten him with the pretorians. All of us understood this as well as he."

Tigellinus had not expected that Petronius would be so bold as to throw such a cast of the dice on the table. He turned pale, lost his head and became speechless. But this was the last victory of the Arbiter of Elegance over his rival.

At that moment Poppaea broke in: "Lord, how canst thou permit that such a thought should pass the head of anybody, and especially that anybody should have the temerity to speak it aloud in thy presence?"

"Punish the insolent one!" repeated Vitelius.

Nero again raised his lips to his nostrils. Turning toward Petronius his near-sighted, glassy eyes, he said:

"Is this the way that thou rewardest me for the friendship which I had for thee?"

"If I am mistaken, point out my mistake," answered Petronius. "But know that I only speak that which my love for thee dictates."

"Punish the insolent one!" repeated Vitelius.

"Do so!" echoed several voices.

Throughout the hall there was a murmur and stir, for every one began to draw away from Petronius. Even Tullius Senecio, his once steadfast friend, and young Nerva, who up to this hour had shown him the greatest affection, withdrew. Soon Petronius was left alone on the left side of the hall. With a smile on his face he arranged the folds of his robe, and awaited what Caesar might say or do.

Caesar said:

"Ye wish me to punish him. He is my companion and friend. Though he has wounded my heart, let him know that this heart has for its friends only forgiveness."

"I have lost! I am ruined!" thought Petronius.

Caesar rose; the conference was at an end.

CHAPTER VII

Petronius returned to his house. Tigellinus accompanied Nero to Poppaea's hall, where people awaited them by appointment with the prefect. There were two rabbis from the Trans-Tiber, in long robes and mitred heads, a young scribe, their assistant, and Chilo. At sight of Caesar the priests paled from excitement, stretched out their arms and bowed their heads.

"We salute thee, O monarch of monarchies and king of kings!" cried the elder. "We salute the ruler of the world, the protector of the people and Caesar, lion among men, whose dominion is like the light of the sun, and like the cedars of Lebanon, like a spring, like a palm tree, and like the balm of Gilead!"

"Ye do not address me as a god?" asked Caesar.

The priests grew paler. The older one continued to speak.

"Thy words, O Lord, are sweet as a cluster of grapes, and as a ripe fig, for Jehovah hath filled thy heart with thy kindness. Thy father's predecessor, Caius Caesar, was a tyrant. Nevertheless, our ambassadors did not address him as a god, preferring death to a breach of the law."

"And Caligula, did he not command them to be thrown to the lions?"

"No, Lord; Caius Caesar feared the wrath of Jehovah." Here they raised their heads, for the name of the Almighty Jehovah restored their courage. Trusting in His might, they were emboldened to look straight into Nero's eyes.

"Do you accuse the Christians of setting fire to Rome?"

"Lord, we accuse them only because they are public enemies of the human race, the enemies of Rome and of thyself. Long ago they threatened the city and the world with fire. This man will tell the rest. He is a truthful man, for in the veins of his mother flowed the blood of the chosen people."

Nero turned to Chilo.

"Who art thou?"

"Thy admirer, Osiris! and besides, a poor Stoic."

"I detest the Stoics!" cried Nero. "I hate Thrasea. I hate Musonius and Cornutus. Their sayings I cannot bear, their contempt for art, their voluntary wretchedness, and their filthiness."

"Lord, thy master, Seneca, has one thousand tables of lemon wood. If it pleases thee, I may have twice as many. I am a Stoic from necessity. Radiant one! encircle my stoicism with a garland of roses, and place near it a pitcher of wine, and it will sing Anacreon in such a manner as to deafen all the Epicureans."

Nero, who was pleased with the name of "Radiant one," smiled and said:

"I am pleased with thee."

"This man is worth his weight in gold," exclaimed Tigellinus.

Chilo answered:

"Lord, fill my weight with thy liberality, or my weight will be blown away by the wind."

"He would not weigh more than Vitelius," said Caesar.

"Eheu! silver-bowed Apollo, my wit is not of lead."

"I notice that faith does not hinder thee from addressing me as a god."

"O immortal one, truth is in thee. The Christians blaspheme against truth, and therefore I hate them."

"What knowest thou of the Christians?" asked Poppaea, a little impatiently.

"Wilt thou permit me to weep, O divinity?"

"No," said Nero; "it annoys me."

"Thou art right threefold, for eyes which have seen

hee ought forever be free from tears. O Lord, defend ne against my enemies."

"Tell us of the Christians," said Poppaea.

"O Isis," answered Chilo, "since my youth I have edicated myself to philosophy and have searched for ruth. I searched for it in the ancient divine philosophers, n the academies of Athens, and in the schools of Alexndria. When I heard of the Christians I presumed that ney formed a kind of new school wherein I might find ome grains of truth, and unfortunately I made their cquaintance. The first Christian that I met was a phyician from Naples, Glaucus by name. From him I earned in due course that they worship a certain Christus, who promised them that he would exterminate all people nd destroy all the cities of the world, but would spare nem should they assist him in stamping out the children f Deucalion. For this reason, O lady, they hate men; or this reason in their meetings they heap curses on Rome nd on all sanctuaries in which homage is given to our ods. Christus was crucified, but he promised them that hen Rome was destroyed by fire he would come again to the world, and give them dominion over the universe."

"Now men will understand why Rome was destroyed y fire!"

"Many already understand it, O Lord," answered hilo, "for I visit the garden and the field of Mars and ach. But if you listen to the end you will understand hy I demand vengeance. At first Glaucus, the physian, did not reveal to me that their religion taught them tred of men. He told me, on the contrary, that hristus is a good God, and that the foundation of their ligion is love. My tender heart could not reject such uth. I therefore loved Glaucus and trusted him. divided with him every morsel of bread, every groat. ady, how dost thou think he repaid me? On the road om Naples to Rome he stabbed me with a knife, and y wife, the beautiful and young Berenice, he sold to a ve trader. Oh that Sophocles knew of my story! But

what do I say! since one better than Sophocles i listening."

"Poor man," said Poppaea.

"Whoever has seen the face of Aphrodite is not poor O lady, and I see her at this moment. But at that tim I sought consolation in philosophy. Coming to Rome tried to reach the Christian elders, in order to obtain jus tice against Glaucus. I thought that they would forc him to give up my wife. I became acquainted wit their High Priest. I know another by the name of Paul who was a prisoner here, but was liberated afterwards I made the acquaintance of the son of Zebedee, of Linus and Clitus, and many others. I know where they lived before the conflagration, and I know where they meet. I can show ye an underground grotto in the Vatican Hill and a cemetery beyond the Nomentan gate where they celebrate their abominable ceremonies. I saw the Apostle Peter. I saw Glaucus killing children so that the Apostle might have something to sprinkle on the heads of those present. I saw Lygia, the ward of Pomponia Graecina who boasted that though she was unable to bring the blood of a child she had caused the death of an infant by bewitching the little Augusta thy daughter, O Osiris and thine, O Isis!"

"Dost thou hear, Caesar?" asked Poppaea.

"Can this be so?" exclaimed Caesar.

"I can forgive wrongs done to myself," continued Chilo, "but hearing of yours, I wanted to stab her. I was unfortunately stopped by the noble Vinitius, whom I love."

"Vinitius? How can that be? Did she not run away from him?"

"She did flee, but he searched for her, as he could not live without her. For a pittance I helped him in his search, and I pointed out to him the house where she lived among the Christians on the other side of the Tiber. We went there together, and with us thy pugilist Croto, whom the noble Vinitius hired for protection. But Ursus, the slave of Lygia, killed him. He is a man of

enormous strength, O Lord, who could wrench off the head of a bull as easily as the head of a poppy from its stalk."

"By Hercules!" cried Nero, "the man who choked Croto is worthy of a statue in the Forum. But thou art mistaken or inventing, for Croto was killed by the knife of Vinitius."

"That is the way in which people lie against the gods, O Lord! I myself saw how the ribs of Croto were crushed in the hands of Ursus, who then fell upon Vinitius. He would have killed him, were it not for Lygia. Vinitius was afterwards sick for a long time, but they nursed him, they hoped that by their kindness he would become a Christian."

"Vinitius?"

"Yes."

"And mayhap Petronius also?" inquired Tigellinus.

Chilo writhed, rubbed his hands and said:

"I admire thy penetration, master. It may be so."

"Now I understand why he defended the Christians!"

But Nero laughed.

"Petronius a Christian? Petronius an enemy of life and comfort? Do not be foolish and ask me to believe it. I am prepared to believe anything else."

"But the noble Vinitius became a Christian, O Lord, I swear it by that lustre that emanates from thee that I speak the truth, and that nothing hurts me so much as falsehood. Pomponia is a Christian, and Lygia and Vinitius are Christians. I served them faithfully, but at the request of Glaucus, the physician, they recompensed me with a flogging, in spite of my advanced age, and though I was suffering from hunger and sickness. I have sworn by Hades, that I will never forget it. O Lord, avenge my wrongs, and I will deliver unto thee the Apostle Peter, the elders Linus, Clitus, Glaucus, and Crispus, as well as Lygia and Ursus. I will point out to thee where hundreds, yea, thousands of them meet. I will show their houses of prayer, and their cemeteries. All thy prisons will not hold them. Without me ye could

not find their abodes. Up to this time, when I was poor, I sought consolation in philosophy. Let me find it now in the favors which will be heaped on me. I am old, and I have not enjoyed life. Let that enjoyment commence now."

"Thou desirest to be a Stoic before a full plate," said Nero.

"Whoever gives his service unto thee will be filled by the same."

"Thou art not mistaken, philosopher."

Poppaea never forgot her enemies. Her liking for Vinitius was but a momentary passion, the result of jealousy, anger, and injured self love. The coldness of the young patrician stung her and filled her heart with stubborn offense. The very fact that he dared to prefer another seemed to her a crime calling for revenge. As for Lygia she had hated her from the very first moment when the beauty of the Northern lily caused her uneasiness. Petronius, who spoke of the too narrow hips of the girl, could say what he pleased to Caesar, but not unto the Augusta. The knowing Poppaea understood at a glance that in all Rome, Lygia alone could rival and even surpass her. From that moment she had sworn her ruin.

"Lord," she cried, "avenge our child!"

"Hasten!" cried Chilo, "hasten! Otherwise Vinitius will hide her. I will point out the house whither she returned after the fire."

"I will give thee ten men. Go there at once," said Tigellinus.

"Master, thou hast not seen Croto in the arms of Ursus. If thou wilt give me fifty men, I will only point out the house from a distance. But if ye do not imprison him, I am ruined."

Tigellinus looked at Nero.

"Would it not be better, O divinity, to rid thyself at one time of both the uncle and the nephew?"

Nero thought for a while and answered.

"No, not now. People would not believe that Petronius, Vinitius, or Pomponia Graecina fired Rome. They

possess exceedingly beautiful houses. We want other victims to-day. Their turn will come next."

"Then, O Lord, give me soldiers as a guard," said Chilo.

"See to this, Tigellinus."

"Thou wilt, meanwhile, live with me," said the prefect.

Joy beamed from the face of the Greek.

"I will deliver them all up, only hasten. Be quick!" he shouted with a hoarse voice.

CHAPTER VIII

When Petronius left Caesar he gave orders that he should be borne to his house on the Carinae. This, surrounded as it was on three sides by a garden and having in front the small forum of Cecilia, had escaped the conflagration. Other Augustales, who had lost their houses with all their treasures and works of art, dubbed Petronius a lucky man. For a long time past they had spoken of him as the first-born son of Fortune. More recently, Caesar's friendship had seemed to confirm their opinion.

But the first-born of Fortune might now meditate on the fickleness of his mother, or rather on her likeness to Time, who devoured his own children.

"Had my house been burned," he said to himself, "together with my gems, my Etruscan vases, Alexandrian glasses and Corinthian bronze, Nero might have forgotten his anger. By Pollux! and it depended upon me alone to be prefect to the pretorians! At this moment I might have held the power to brand Tigellinus as the incendiary, which he is in fact. I should have placed him in the tunic of torture, delivered him over to the mob, saved the Christians and rebuilt Rome. Who knows but that a happier period might not have arisen for honest men? I ought to have done that, were it only for Vinitius's sake. If the work had proved too hard, I could have surrendered the office of prefect to him. Nero would not even have

attempted opposition. Then Vinitius might have baptized all the pretorians and even Caesar himself. What harm could that have done me? Nero pious, Nero virtuous and merciful, this would even be an amusing sight." Such was his light-hearted indifference that he began to laugh But after awhile his thoughts flowed into another channel. He was in Antium and Paul of Tarsus was speaking to him. "Ye call us the enemies of life, but answer me, Petronius, if Caesar were a Christian and acted according to our doctrines, would not your lives be more secure?" Recollecting these words he continued: "By Castor! even if they were to murder all the Christians here, Paul would find new ones, for, as the world cannot stand on knavery, he is necessarily right. But who knows whether knavery may not triumph? I myself who have learned not a little, did not learn enough to be a great enough rogue. So I may even have to open my veins. But in any event this must have been the end, or if not something similar. I am only sorry for my Eunice and Myrrhine vase. Eunice, however, is free and the vase will go with me. Bronzebeard shall not get it by any means. I am also sorry for Vinitius. Life of late had become less burdensome than of yore. Nevertheless I am ready. 'Tis a beautiful world, but most of the people are so base that it is not worth while living. Though an Augustale, I was a freer man than they supposed."

Here he shrugged his shoulders.

"Perchance they think that at this moment my knees are trembling, that from fear my hair stands on end. But when I reach home I will take a bath in violet water, then, my golden-haired lady will herself anoint me, and after refreshment we shall command the singing aloud of that hymn to Apollo, which Anthemius composed. I myself once said that it is not worth while to think of death, for it thinks of us in spite of ourselves. How strange if in reality there should prove to be Elysian fields, and in them the shades of the departed! In that

case Eunice would at once come to me, and we should together wander over meadows and among asphodel plants. We should find better company there than here. What a farce! What jugglery! What a populace, tasteless and unpolished. Tens of Arbiters of Elegance could not change those Trimalchions into respectable people. By Persephone, I have had enough of them!"

He had noticed with surprise that something had already separated him from the world. He had known it well and had known therefore what to think of it, but now a greater contempt than ever came over him. Surely he had had enough of it all!

Then he reflected on the situation. He understood that destruction did not threaten him just yet. Nero had uttered a few choice, lofty and agreeable words concerning forgiveness which committed him for the moment. He would now be obliged to search for a pretext, and in the search time must elapse. "The first thing he will do is to send the Christians into the arena," said Petronius to himself. "Next he will think of me. If so, it is not worth while to trouble myself about it, nor change my mode of life. Vinitius is in more immediate peril." And from this on he thought only of Vinitius, whom he was determined to save.

Slaves bore his litter hastily through the ruins, the ash heaps and chimneys, with which the Carinae was yet filled, but he commanded them to hurry on, so that he might reach home as quickly as possible. Vinitius, whose "island" had been burned, now lived with him, and fortunately was at home.

"Hast thou seen Lygia to-day?" asked Petronius as he entered.

"I have just returned from her."

"Hearken to what I have to say and lose no time in questions. It was resolved to-day at Caesar's to lay upon the Christians the guilt of the burning of Rome. Terrible persecutions and tortures await them. Pursuit may begin at any moment. Take Lygia and flee in-

stantly, be it beyond the Alps or to Africa. Hurry! for it is nearer from the Palatine to the Trans-Tiber than to this place."

Vinitius was too much of a soldier to lose time in asking questions. He listened with knitted brows, and with a face determined and terrible. It was obvious that his impulse was to defend himself and give battle.

"I go," said he.

"One word more, take a purse of gold, take arms, and a few of thy Christian people. In case of need rescue her!"

Vinitius was already at the door of the hall.

"Send me news by a slave," Petronius called out.

He was left alone. Walking along the columns which embellished the hall, his mind dwelt on all which had come to pass. He knew that Lygia and Linus had returned after the fire to their former home, which, with the greater part of the Trans-Tiber, had been spared. This was unfortunate. Otherwise it would not have been easy to find them among the crowds of people. Petronius believed, however, that nobody in the Palatine knew where they lived. In such case Vinitius would anticipate the pretorian guards. It also struck him that Tigellinus, wishing to capture as many Christians as possible at a time, must spread the net over all Rome; that is, he would have to distribute the pretorians in small divisions. "If he sent only a few men for Lygia," he thought, "that Lygian giant would break their bones, and what will happen if Vinitius arrives with assistance?" This thought reassured him. Surely armed resistance to the pretorians were tantamount to war with Caesar. Petronius also knew that if Vinitius hid himself from Nero's vengeance, that same vengeance might fall on himself. But he did not stop to think of this. Indeed, he rejoiced at the thought of confounding Nero's plans through those of Tigellinus, and determined not to spare either men or money. Paul of Tarsus at Antium had converted the greater part of his slaves. Wherefore, he

might be sure, that in defending the Christians he could count on their readiness and devotion.

The entrance of Eunice interrupted his thoughts. At sight of her his cares and troubles flew and left no trace behind. He forgot Caesar, the disfavor into which he had fallen, the degradation of the Augustales, the persecution which threatened the Christians, and Vinitius and Lygia. He only looked upon her with aesthetic eyes, enamored of wonderful forms, and of a mistress who breathed love through such a form. Arrayed in a transparent violet robe through which shone her rose-colored body she was in truth as beautiful as a goddess. Conscious of the admiration she excited, loving Petronius with her whole soul, and ever ready for his caresses, she now began to blush for joy as though she were not a concubine, but an innocent maiden.

"What hast thou to say, Charis?" said Petronius, stretching out his hand to her.

Inclining her golden head she answered:

"Anthemius has arrived with his choristers; he asks if it is thy wish to hear him to-day?"

"Let him wait. Let him sing to us after dinner and near the hearth of the yet burning ashes we shall listen to the hymn to Apollo. By the groves of Paphos! When I see thee thus robed it seems to me that Aphrodite, veiled with a portion of the sky, stands before me."

"Oh, master!" said Eunice.

"Come hither, Eunice, embrace me, and surrender me thy mouth. Dost thou love me?"

"I could not have loved Zeus more."

She pressed her lips to his mouth, trembling in his arms from happiness.

After a while Petronius said:

"Suppose the time has arrived when we must separate?"

Eunice looked in his eyes with fear.

"How so, master?"

"Fear not? But who knows whether I may not have to set out on a long voyage."

"Take me also."

Petronius suddenly changed the conversation and asked:

"Tell me, are there any asphodels on the lawns?"

"The cypresses and the lawns are withered from the fire, and the leaves have fallen from the myrtles. The entire garden wears the aspect of death."

"All Rome wears the aspect of death. It will shortly be a real graveyard. Dost thou know that an edict is about to be issued against the Christians? Then will commence a persecution in which thousands of people will perish."

"Why should they be punished, master? they are a good and quiet people."

"Just for that very reason."

"Then let us go to the sea; thy divine eyes cannot look on blood."

"Yea, but meantime I must bathe. Come to the anointing room and rub unguents on my arms. By the ribbon of Cypria, never hast thou appeared to me so beautiful. I will order a bath to be made for thee in the form of a shell, and thou shalt appear like a costly pearl within it. Come, oh, golden-haired one!"

They went out. An hour later both of them, their heads wreathed with roses, their eyes covered with mist, rested at a table spread with vessels of gold. They were served by youths attired as cupids, they drank wine from ivy-covered goblets, and heard the hymn to Apollo sung to the music of the harp under the direction of Anthemius. What did they care, though around their villa arose like funeral piles the chimneys of the ruined houses, and though gusts of wind scattered the ashes of burned Rome? They felt themselves happy and thought of nothing else but love, which made their lives a divine dream.

But before the hymn was at an end, a slave entered the hall.

"Master," he said, in a voice trembling with alarm, "a centurion with a detachment of pretorian guards stands

below and at Caesar's command wishes to see thee."

The song and the music ceased. All present were alarmed, for Caesar was not accustomed to send pretorians on friendly errands, and their presence in those days foreboded no good. Petronius was the only one who did not show the slightest fear. He merely said, with the air of one annoyed by too frequent callers:

"They might have let me dine in peace."

Then turning to the slave he said: "Let them enter."

The slave disappeared behind the curtain. A moment later heavy steps were heard and an acquaintance of Petronius, the centurion Aper, armed, and with an iron helmet on his head entered the hall.

"Noble Lord," he said, "here is a writing from Caesar."

Petronius extended his white hand deliberately, took the writing, read it, and handed it with the greatest composure to Eunice.

"He reads a new book on the Troyad this evening, and commands my presence."

"I have no order save to deliver the writing," said the centurion.

"Yes! there will be no reply, but, centurion, thou mightest as well rest a little with us, and empty a goblet of wine?"

"Thanks, noble Lord. Gladly will I drink a goblet of wine to thy health, but I cannot remain, for I am on duty."

"Why did Caesar send the letter by thee and not by a slave?"

"I know not, master. Perchance it was because I was ordered for another service in this direction."

"I know," said Petronius, "against the Christians?"

"True, master,"

"Is it long since the pursuit began?"

"Some divisions were dispatched to the Trans-Tiber before noon."

Thus saying the centurion spilled a little wine in honor of Mars, then he quaffed it and said:

"May the gods grant thee thy desires!"

"Take the goblet and keep it," said Petronius.

Then he signalled to Anthemius to finish the hymn to Apollo.

"Bronzebeard seeks to play with me and Vinitius," he said to himself when the harp sounded anew. "I divine his purpose. He wanted to frighten me by sending his summons through a centurion. In the evening the centurion will be asked in what manner I received him. No! No! Thou wilt not amuse thyself overmuch, oh, malicious and cruel mountebank. I know that thou wilt not forget the offense. I know that my destruction is certain. But if thou thinkest that I will look into thine eyes beseechingly, that thou wilt see in my face either terror or humility, thou deceivest thyself."

"Caesar writes, master, 'Come if thou desirest,'" said Eunice. "Wilt thou go?"

"I am in good health, so that I can even listen to his verses," answered Petronius. "I shall go, the more so because Vinitius cannot."

After dinner and his usual promenade he placed himself in the hands of his slaves, hair dressers and attendants, who arranged the folds of his garments, and, in an hour's time, beautiful as a god, he had himself borne to the Palatine. It was late. The evening was calm and warm. The moon shone so brightly that the lamplighters preceding the litter extinguished the lamps. On the streets and amid the ruins lurked drunken crowds, adorned with garlands of ivy and honey-suckle, carrying in their hands branches of myrtle and laurel procured from Caesar's gardens. An abundance of grain and the expectation of splendid games had filled the popular heart with joy. Here and there songs were heard, magnifying the divine night and power of love. Here and there people danced in the moonlight. The slaves had to force a way for the litter of the "noble Petronius," and then the mob fell back and shouted in honor of their favorite.

He thought of Vinitius and marvelled why he had no news from him. He was an epicurean and an egotist, but, through his associations, now with Paul of Tarsus,

now with Vinitius, and hearing daily of the Christians, he had changed a little without being aware of it. A breeze, as it were, had wafted upon his soul an unknown seed. The welfare of others occupied him as well as his own. To Vinitius he had always been attached. In his youthful days he had loved Vinitius's mother, his own sister. Now, therefore, when he was taking an interest in his nephew's affairs, he looked upon them with as much concern as he would have looked on a tragedy. He did not lose hope that Vinitius had anticipated the pretorians and fled with Lygia, or at the worst had rescued her. But he would have liked to be sure of this. He foresaw that he might be called upon to answer various questions for which it would be well to be prepared. Halting in front of the house of Tiberius he alighted from his litter. After awhile he entered Caesar's hall, already filled with courtiers. His friends of yesterday, though somewhat astonished at the fact that he had been invited, moved away from him. But he mingled among them, beautiful, independent, careless and self-confident, like one who has favors to distribute. Seeing this some were disturbed, lest their coldness towards him might be premature.

Caesar, however, feigned not to see him, and made no response to his bow, being apparently occupied in conversation.

But Tigellinus approached and said:

"Good evening, Arbiter of Elegance. Dost thou still assert that Rome was not burned by the Christians?"

Petronius shrugged his shoulders, and, tapping Tigellinus on his shoulder blade, as he would a freedman, answered:

"Thou knowest as well as I what is true."

"I did not venture to compare myself with thee in wisdom."

"For once thou art right. Caesar reads us a song from the Troyad, thou wilt be obliged, instead of screaming like a peacock, to say something approaching absurdity."

Tigellinus bit his lips. He was not overjoyed that

Caesar should have decided to read a new song, for that opened out a field in which he could not compare favorably with Petronius. It actually happened that, at the time of the reading, Nero involuntarily, from the old habit, turned his eyes toward Petronius with careful scrutiny as if to read his face. Petronius, as he listened, raised his brows, approved at times, and at others intensified his attention as if he wanted to be sure that he had heard correctly. Some parts he praised, others he criticised, recommending modifications or corrections. Nero could not fail to recognize that others in their fulsome praises thought only of themselves, while Petronius occupied himself with poetry for its own sake. He alone understood it. When he happened to praise, one could be certain that the verses were good. Little by little he was drawn into a discussion with him. Finally, when Petronius questioned the fitness of a certain expression, he said:

"Thou wilt see in the last song why I used it."

"Ah!" thought Petronius, "then we shall wait for the last poem."

Many in the audience thought to themselves:

"Woe is me! Petronius, having ample time, may return to favor and even overthrow Tigellinus."

They began to flock around him. But the close of the evening was less fortunate. When Petronius was taking leave, Caesar asked suddenly, with blinking eyes, and a face full of malicious delight:

"Why did Vinitius not come?"

Had Petronius been certain that Vinitius and Lygia were already beyond the gates of the city, he might have replied:

"He was married, with thy permission, and left." But observing the odd expression of Nero, he answered:

"Thy invitation, O divine one, did not find him at home."

"Tell him that I shall be glad to see him," answered Nero, "and tell him that from me, not to miss the games in which the Christians shall appear."

These words alarmed Petronius. They seemed to him a direct allusion to Lygia. Seated in his litter he gave orders for even greater dispatch than in the morning. But this was no easy task. In front of Tiberius's house stood a dense and tumultuous crowd, drunk as before, but not singing and dancing. They were evidently excited. Cries were heard from a distance which Petronius at first could not comprehend, but these increased in volume, until, at last, they changed into one wild roar:

"The Christians to the lions!"

Splendid litters of courtiers hustled through the howling multitude. From the depths of the burned streets poured in new crowds, who, hearing the cries, repeated them. The news flew from mouth to mouth that the pursuit had been continued since noon and that already a great number of incendiaries had been caught. Along the new streets and the old, through alleys lying among the ruins near the Palatine, along all the hills and gardens, through the length and breadth of Rome rang ever-increasing shouts.

"The Christians to the lions!"

"Asses!" thought Petronius with contempt, "the people are worthy of their Caesar."

And it struck him that a people propped up by force, by cruelty such as even barbarians had no conception of, mad and dissolute, could not endure. Rome dominated the world, but it was also its sore. From it was wafted a putrid odor. Over decaying life hovered the shadow of death. More than once had this been spoken of even among the Augustales. But never before had the truth come so near home to Petronius that the garlanded chariot upon which stood the statue of Rome in the guise of a triumphator, dragging behind it a chained herd of nations, was hastening on to a precipice. The life of the world-ruling city appeared to him a sort of mad dance, an orgy, which must soon come to a close.

He now perceived that the Christians alone had a new foundation for life. But, alas! before long not a vestige would be left of the Christians. And what then? The

mad dance would continue under the lash of Nero. When Nero was gone another would be found like him or even worse, since among such people and such patricians there was no hope for a better one. There would be a new orgy, viler and fouler than ever. But the orgy could not last forever. Sleep must terminate it, even through very exhaustion.

Brooding thus, Petronius felt greatly troubled. Was life worth while if spent in uncertainty, with no aim save to gaze upon a world of this sort? The angel of death was no less beautiful than the angel of sleep. He also had wings on his shoulders.

The litter stopped in front of Petronius's door. It was opened at once by the ever-watchful porter.

"Has the noble Vinitius returned?" asked Petronius.

"A moment ago, master," answered the slave.

"So he could not have rescued her," mused Petronius.

Casting aside his toga he made his way into the hall.

Vinitius was sitting on a three-legged stool, his head bent almost to his knees and his hands on his head. At the sound of steps he raised his stone-like face in which his eyes shone with a feverish gleam.

"Didst thou arrive too late?" asked Petronius.

"Yes! They had taken her before noon."

"Hast thou seen her?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"In the Mamertine prison."

Petronius shuddered, and cast an inquiring glance on Vinitius.

"No," said the latter, comprehending his meaning, "they did not thrust her down in the Tullianum,* nor in the middle prison. I paid the guard to surrender his own room to her. Ursus took his place at the threshold, and now watches over her."

"Why did not Ursus defend her?"

*The lowest part of the prison, lying entirely underground. It had only one aperture in the ceiling. It was here that Jugurtha perished from hunger.

"They sent fifty pretorians, and Linus prohibited him."

"But Linus?"

"Linus is dying. That is why they did not take him."

"What do you propose to do?"

"To rescue her, or die with her, for I also believe in Christ."

Though Vinitius spoke quietly, his voice betrayed his despair. Petronius's heart beat with responsive pity.

"I understand thee," he said. "But what is thy plan of rescue?"

"I paid large sums to the guards, first, to protect her from indignity, and second, to make no effort to impede her flight."

"When will that be accomplished?"

"They replied that they could deliver her up to me at once, as they feared further responsibility. As soon as the prison is crowded and the register of the prisoners becomes confused, they will deliver her to me. But this is a last resource! Do thou save her and me. Thou art Caesar's friend. He himself gave her to me. Go to him and save us."

In lieu of replying, Petronius called a slave and commanded him to bring two dark mantles and two short swords. Then he turned to Vinitius.

"On the road I shall answer thee," he said. "Meanwhile, take a mantle, take arms, and we will go to the prison. There give the guards a hundred thousand sesterces—give them twice, or even five times, as much—if they agree to free Lygia immediately. Otherwise it will be too late."

"Let us go!" cried Vinitius.

"Now listen to me," said Petronius, as they reached the street. "We must lose no time. From now on I am in disgrace. My own life hangs suspended on a hair, therefore I can get nothing from Caesar. Worse still, I am certain that to spite me he would refuse my request. Were it not for this, would I have counselled thee to flee with her or to rescue her? If thou shouldst succeed in escaping, the wrath of Caesar will fall upon me. He

might concede thy request to-day, but not mine. Nevertheless, count not on that. Nothing else remains for thee to do. If this does not succeed, then there will be time for other remedies. For the present, know that Lygia is a prisoner not only because of her belief in Christ, but because Poppaea's anger is against her and thee, and she persecutes you both. Hast thou forgotten that thou didst offend the Augusta by rejecting her? She knows that Lygia was the cause of the rejection. She has hated her from the first. Once before she sought to destroy her by attributing to her the death of her child by witchcraft. Thus the finger of Poppaea is in all that is now happening. Thou art now able to answer the question, Why Lygia was the first to be imprisoned? Who could have pointed out the house of Linus? But I can tell you that she has been shadowed for some time. I know that I wring thy soul and tear the last shred of hope from thee. But I say all this purposely, for if thou failest to free her before they scent a hint of the purpose, then ye are both lost."

"True. I understand all," answered Vinitius, in a hollow voice.

Owing to the lateness of the hour, the streets were deserted. Further conversation was interrupted by a drunken gladiator. He reeled against Petronius, and placed his hand on his shoulder. Breathing into his face the odor of wine, he shouted in a hoarse voice:

"The Christians to the lions!"

"Mirmillon," was Petronius's quiet answer, "hearken to good advice. Hurry on thy way."

The drunken gladiator seized Petronius by the other hand.

"Shout instantly 'The Christians to the lions!' or I will break thy neck."

Petronius's nerves had had enough of these vociferations. From the time he had left the Palatine they had shocked him like a nightmare, and deafened him. So when he saw the uplifted hand ready to strike him, the measure of his patience was filled.

"Friend," he said, "thou smellest of wine and impedest my way."

So saying, he ran the short weapon, with which he had armed himself, up to the hilt in the man's breast. Taking Vinitius by the arm, he moved on as though nothing had happened.

"Caesar said to me to-day, 'Ask Vinitius in my name to be present at the games in which the Christians will appear.' Dost thou comprehend what he means? They wish to extract joy from thy pain. This is a fact. This may be the reason why thou and I have not yet been imprisoned. If thou art not able to take her from prison—I know not! Perhaps Actea will intercede in thy behalf. But can she do it? Thy Sicilian lands may also tempt Tigellinus. Make the experiment."

"I will give him all that I possess," answered Vinitius.

From the Carinae to the Forum was not far. They soon arrived there. Night was already paling, and the outlines of the walls of the castle could be discerned.

Suddenly, while they were turning toward the Mamertine prison, Petronius stopped and said:

"Pretorians! It is too late!"

And in fact the prison was surrounded by a double row of soldiers. The dawn silvered their iron helmets and the points of their javelins. Vinitius's face grew as pale as marble.

"Let us go," he said.

For a moment they stood near the lines. Petronius, who was gifted with an extraordinary memory, knew not only the chiefs, but nearly all the pretorian soldiers. He soon discovered one of his old acquaintances, who was the leader of a cohort. He nodded to him.

"What does this mean, Niger?" he asked. "Did they order you to guard the prison?"

"Yes, noble Petronius; the prefect feared lest attempts might be made to rescue the incendiaries."

"Have you an order to refuse admittance?" inquired Vinitius.

"No, master, we have none. Friends will visit the

prisoners, and thus we shall be enabled to seize more Christians."

"Then let me in," said Vinitius.

Pressing Petronius's hands, he said to him:

"See Actea. I will come to you for her answer."

"Come," replied Petronius.

At this moment, from beneath the ground and beyond the thick walls, was heard the sound of singing. A hymn low and faint at first, by degrees it swelled in volume. Voices of men, women and children formed together a harmonious chorus. The whole prison began to resound like a harp in the quiet dawn. They were not voices of anguish or despair, but on the contrary, of joy and triumph!

The soldiers looked at one another in amazement. In the sky appeared the golden and rosy glimmer of the morning.

CHAPTER IX

The clamor, "The Christians to the lions!" arose continuously in all parts of the city. From the first, not only did nobody doubt that the Christians were the incendiaries, but nobody wished to doubt, since their punishment would yield amusement for every one. Nevertheless, it was fancied that the catastrophe would not have been so severe were it not for the anger of the gods. For this reason, purifying sacrifices were ordered in the sanctuaries. After consultation of the Sybilline books, the senate ordered solemnities and public prayers to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpina. Matrons laid offerings before Juno. A great many of them went in procession to the seashore to draw water and besprinkle the statue of the goddess. Married women prepared feasts for the gods and night watches. All Rome purified itself from sin, brought offerings, and reconciled itself with the immortals.

Meanwhile, broad new streets were laid out in the midst of the burned place. Here and there foundations were already laid for spacious edifices, palaces, and sanctuaries. But first of all was constructed, with unprecedented speed, an enormous wooden amphitheatre, in which the Christians were to suffer. Soon after the consultation in the house of Tiberius, orders were sent out to the pro-consuls to procure wild beasts. Tigellinus emptied the menageries of all Italian cities, not excepting the smallest. At his command gigantic hunts were ordered in Africa, in which all the natives were forced to take part. Elephants and tigers were ordered from Asia, crocodiles and hippopotami from the Nile, lions from the Atlas, wolves and bears from the Pyrenees, savage dogs from Ireland, Molossian dogs from Epirus, bisons and gigantic wild bulls from Germany. The great number of prisoners would make the games surpass in magnitude all hitherto seen. Caesar desired to drown the memory of the conflagration in blood, to intoxicate Rome with it, hence the flow of blood would be more abundant than had ever been known.

The people were eager to help the guards and the pretorians in their hunt for Christians. It was not a difficult task, for whole crowds of them encamped among the people, in the midst of the gardens, and openly made known their faith. When they were surrounded, they knelt and, singing hymns, permitted themselves to be led away without resistance. Their patience only increased the anger of the mob, who, not understanding its source, looked upon it as wrath and a hardened endurance in crime. Madness seized the persecutors. Often the rabble wrested Christian captives from the pretorians and tore them to pieces. Women were dragged to prison by their hair. Children's heads were dashed against the stones. Thousands of howling people ran wildly through the streets, day and night. They searched for victims among the ruins, in chimneys, and in the cellars. In front of the prisons, around fires and casks of wine, were celebrated bacchanalian feasts and dances. In the eve-

ning the noise of the drunken crowd, like the roar of thunder, reverberated through the whole city. The mob and the pretorians daily brought in new victims. Pity was extinguished. It appeared as though the citizens in their wild frenzy had forgotten everything except one clamor—"The Christians to the lions!" The days and nights were sultrier than ever before known in Rome. The very air seemed to be filled with madness, blood and crime.

The marvellous lust for cruelty was met by an equally marvellous desire for martyrdom. The confessors of Christ went willingly to death; yea, they even sought death, until they were held back by the command of their superiors, who charged them to betake themselves out of the city, in subterranean places near the Appian Way, and in the suburban vineyards belonging to patrician Christians. These had so far escaped imprisonment. It was known perfectly well on the Palatine that among the Christians were numbered Flavius Domitilla, Pomponia Graecina, Cornelius Pudens, and Vinitius. Caesar, however, feared that the crowd would not listen to accusations of incendiarism against citizens of this stripe. Since it was above all necessary to convince the people, punishment and vengeance against these were deferred until later. Those who thought that the patricians' safety was owing to Actea's influence were mistaken. Petronius, after parting with Vinitius, had gone directly to Actea to ask help for Lygia, but she could only offer him tears, for she lived in suffering and neglect, and was only tolerated so long as she hid herself from Poppaea and Caesar.

Nevertheless, she visited Lygia in prison and brought her clothing and food, and at the same time protected her from injury at the hands of the prison guards, who, by the way, were already bribed.

Petronius could not forget that had it not been for him and his project of taking Lygia from the house of Aulus, the maiden would most likely have not now been in prison. He was eager, moreover, to win the game against

Tigellinus; so he spared neither time nor expense. In the course of a few days he interviewed Seneca, Domitius Afer, Crispinilla (through whom he wished to reach Poppaea), Terpnos, Diodorus, and the beautiful Pythagoras, and finally Aliturus and Paris, to whom Caesar seldom refused anything. With the help of Chrysothemis, now the mistress of Vatinius, he tried to gain even his aid. In all cases he was unsparing of his promises of favors as well as his money.

But all their efforts were fruitless. Seneca, uncertain of his own morrow, argued that the Christians, even if they had not burned Rome, ought to be exterminated for the good of the city. He justified the coming slaughter from a logical standpoint. Terpnos and Diodorus accepted money, but did nothing in return. Vatinius reported to Caesar that an effort had been made to bribe him. Aliturus alone, who at the beginning of the persecution was hostile to the Christians, took pity on them, and dared to remind Caesar of the imprisoned maiden, and to intercede in her behalf. Yet he obtained nothing but the answer:

"Dost thou think that my soul is less than that of Brutus, who for Rome's welfare did not even spare his own sons?"

When Aliturus repeated that reply to Petronius, the latter said:

"Now that Caesar has compared himself to Brutus, there is no salvation."

He was sorry for Vinitius, and he feared lest he might commit suicide. "For the present," he said to himself, "he is supported by his efforts to save her, by the sight of her, and by his own sufferings; but when all plans fail, and the spark of hope is extinguished, by Castor! he will not survive, and will throw himself on his sword." Petronius could understand a death of this sort better than he could the love and suffering of Vinitius.

Meanwhile Vinitius was doing his best to save Lygia. He visited the Augustales, and unbent his pride to crave their assistance. Through Vitelius, he offered Tigelli-

nus his Sicilian lands and all he might ask. But Tigellinus, apparently not wishing to offend the Augusta, refused. To go to Caesar himself, kneel down before him, embrace his knees, and supplicate him, would lead to nothing. Vinitius, it is true, wished to do this, but Petronius, learning his purpose, asked:

"Suppose he should refuse thee, or answer thee with a jest, or with a foul threat, what wouldst thou do?"

Upon this the features of Vinitius contracted with pain and rage, and between his set jaws his teeth gritted together.

"Yes," said Petronius, "I advise thee against this, if thou wouldst not close all roads of rescue."

Vinitius checked himself, and, passing his hand over his forehead, wiped off cold perspiration.

"No, no!" he cried. "I am a Christian."

"And thou wilt forget this, as thou didst forget it a moment ago."

CHAPTER X

All plans had failed. Vinitius had humiliated himself even to the extent of seeking support from the freedmen and the slaves of both Caesar and Poppaea. He paid enormous sums for empty promises. By rich gifts he won only their good will. He found the first husband of Poppaea, and secured a letter from him. He made a present of a villa in Antium to Rufius, her son by the first marriage. He only succeeded in angering Caesar, who disliked his stepson. He despatched a special courier to Poppaea's second husband, Otho, in Spain, offering him all his possessions. At last, he realized that he was but the plaything of these people, and that if he had shown less anxiety about the imprisonment of Lygia, he might have freed her sooner.

Petronius also realized this. Meanwhile, day passed after day, and the amphitheatre was finished. The en-

trance tickets to the morning games were already distributed. But now the morning games, on account of the unprecedented number of victims, were to continue for days and weeks, and even months. They did not know where to lodge the multitude of Christians. The prisons were overcrowded, and fever was raging among them. The Puticulli, the common pits where slaves were confined, also began to be filled, and it was feared lest an epidemic should break out and spread over the whole town. Therefore haste was necessary.

All these reports came to the ears of Vinitius, and extinguished the last spark of hope. While there was yet time something seemed possible, but now this time had passed. The spectacle must begin. Lygia might be brought any day into the dungeon of the circus, the only outlet to which was the arena. Vinitius knew not where fate or superior force might throw her. He visited every circus, bribing the guards and the keepers of the wild beasts, and proposing to them plans which they could not execute. At times he recognized that the utmost he could hope for was to lessen the horrors of her death. Then he would feel that not brains, but burning coals, filled his skull.

He had no thought of outliving her. He resolved to perish with her. His fear was lest pain might burn the life out of him ere the horrible end arrived. Petronius and all his friends thought that any day might open to him the kingdom of shadows. The face of Vinitius was black, and resembled those waxen masks which were kept in the sanctuaries of the tutelar deities. His features grew cold. He seemed unconscious of all that was going on around him. If one spoke to him he raised his hand mechanically to his head, and, pressing his temples with the palm of his hands, looked at the speaker with inquiry and dismay. He passed his nights with Ursus at Lygia's door in the prison. When she ordered him to leave and seek rest, he returned to Petronius and paced along the hall till morning.

"Thou hast a right to destroy thyself, but not her.

Remember what Sejanus's daughter suffered before death," said Petronius.

He was not entirely sincere in this speech, for Vinitius concerned him more than Lygia. But he saw that he could do nothing to restrain him from a dangerous step save to assure him that he would draw down irrevocable peril on Lygia. In this he was right, for on the Palatine they expected the visit of the young Tribune, and had prepared themselves for it. But the sufferings of Vinitius were too great even for a strong man. From the moment when Lygia had been imprisoned, and the glory of the coming martyrdom had fallen upon her, he not only loved her a hundredfold more, but actually adored her, giving her almost religious honor, as he would to a divinity. Now that he must lose that beloved and adored being—now that death, and something worse than death, might befall her—the blood froze in his veins. His soul was changed into one groan. His thoughts were confused. At times it seemed to him that his head was filled with fires which would either burn or split it. He ceased to understand why Christ, as the Merciful One, as God, did not come to aid those who confess Him—why the smoky walls of the Palatine did not sink into the ground, and with them Nero and the Augustales, the pretorian camp, and the whole city with its burden of crime. He thought it could not and ought not to be otherwise. All that his eyes gazed upon, all that was shattering his soul and breaking his heart, seemed a dream. But the roaring of the wild beasts awoke him to the fact that it was a reality; the noise of the axes under which the arena rose told him it was true, and that truth was emphasized by the howlings of the populace and the crowded state of the prisons.

Then his faith in Christ was shaken, and that was a new torture, probably the most awful of all. It was at this moment that Petronius had said to him: "Remember what the daughter of Sejanus suffered before her death." Slaves often found him kneeling with his hands raised, or lying prostrate with his face to the earth, pray-

ing to Christ, for He was his last hope. Everything had failed. Lygia could only be rescued by a miracle, and in order that she might be saved by a miracle, Vinitius beat the stones of the floor with his brow.

There still remained to him the knowledge that Peter's prayers were of more value than his. Peter had promised Lygia to him; Peter had baptized him; Peter himself performed miracles; let him give help and rescue.

One night he sought the Apostle. The Christians, of whom only a few remained, had hidden him carefully even from one another, lest the weaker in spirit might betray him unwittingly or unintentionally. Vinitius, in the midst of general confusion and terror, occupied only with his efforts to get Lygia out of prison, had lost sight of the Apostle. From the time of his baptism he had seen him but once, and that was before the beginning of the persecution. But going to the quarryman in whose hut he had been baptized, he learned from him that there would be a meeting of Christians in the vineyards situated outside the Porto Salaria, belonging to Cornelius Pudens. The quarryman undertook to guide him to the vineyard, assuring him that he would find Peter there. When it became dark they started, passed beyond the walls, walked through hollows overgrown with reeds, and reached the vineyard, which lay in a wild and secluded place. The meeting was held in a wine shed. As Vinitius neared the place, the murmur of prayer reached his ears. On entering he saw, by the dim light of a lantern, several scores of kneeling people absorbed in prayer. They recited a Litany; a chorus of voices, male and female, repeated every moment, "Christ have mercy." Deep and heartrending sorrow was expressed in those voices.

Peter was present. He was kneeling in front, near a wooden cross fastened to the wall of the shed. He was lost in prayer. Vinitius recognized him from a distance by his white hair and uplifted hands. The first thought of the young patrician was to advance through the kneeling people, cast himself at the feet of the Apostle, and cry,

"Help!" But either out of a sense of the decorum due to prayer, or because of a weakness which bent his knees under him, he began to repeat, groaning and swinging his hands, "Christ have mercy!" Had he been fully conscious he would have realized that his prayer was not the only one with a groan in it, and that he was not the only supplicant who brought here pain, sorrow and grief. There was no one present in that meeting who had not lost dear ones at a time when the most zealous and the boldest believers were already prisoners, when with every moment news was received of new insults and tortures inflicted upon the prisoners. The magnitude of the calamity exceeded all imagination. When only a handful of Christians remained, there was not one heart in the midst of them which was not alarmed in faith and did not ask doubtingly, "Where is Christ? Why does He tolerate evil, so that it becomes mightier than God?"

Meanwhile they besought Him in despair for mercy, for in each soul there still smouldered a spark of hope that He would come, destroy evil, throw Nero into the abyss, and rule the world. They still looked toward the sky; they still listened; they still prayed with trembling. Vinitius also, as he repeated "Christ have mercy!" was seized with such an ecstasy as he had once before experienced in the quarryman's hut. Now they call on Him from the depths of their sorrow; now Peter calls on Him. At any moment the heavens might open, the earth be shaken to its foundations, and He appear in infinite glory, with stars at His feet, merciful but terrible. He would resuscitate His faithful ones and command the abyss to swallow up their persecutors.

Vinitius covered his face with both hands, and cast himself to the ground. Silence fell around him at once, as if fear had hushed the voices of all present. It seemed to him that now at last something must happen, that the moment for a miracle had arrived. He was certain that when he arose and opened his eyes he would see a light blinding to mortals.

But the silence was unbroken, until interrupted by the

sobbing of the women. Vinitius rose and looked with dazed eyes around him. In the shed, instead of heavenly glory, flickered the dim glow of the lanterns. The moon penetrated through an opening in the roof, filling the shed with a silvery light. The people kneeling around Vinitius raised their tearful eyes in silence toward the cross. Here and there sobbing was heard, and from the outside came the whistling of the watchman. Then Peter arose, turned toward the congregation, and said:

"Children, lift up your hearts towards our Redeemer, and offer to him your tears." Then he was silent.

Suddenly from the midst of the congregation the voice of a woman, sorrowful and complaining, was heard.

"I am a widow. I had only one son, who supported me. Return him to me, O Lord!"

Silence reigned again. Peter was standing near the kneeling group, old and full of care. In that moment he appeared to them the personification of decrepitude and weakness.

Then another voice began to complain:

"Executioners dishonored my daughter, yet Christ allowed it."

Then a third voice:

"I remain alone with the children, and when I am taken who will give them bread and water?"

Then a fourth:

"Linus, whom they spared at first, they have taken again and put to torture, O Lord!"

Then a fifth:

"When we return home the pretorians will seize us. Where shall we hide?"

"Woe to us! Who will protect us?"

Thus in the silence of night rose complaint after complaint. The old fisherman closed his eyes and shook his white head over the pain and suffering of humanity. Silence reigned again. Only the watchman gave out a low whistle beyond the shed.

Vinitius sprang up again, so as to push through the group to the Apostle and demand help from him. But

of a sudden he saw in front of him, as it were, a precipice, a sight that took the strength from his feet. What would happen if the Apostle should confess his own weakness, and affirm that the Roman Caesar was mightier than Christ of Nazareth? Terrified at that thought, he felt that in such case not only would the remainder of his hope fall over the precipice, but also he and Lygia, and his love for Christ, his faith, and everything for which he lived. Nothing would remain save death and a night like a boundless sea.

And now Peter spoke, beginning in a voice so low that one could barely hear him.

"My children, I have seen how on Golgotha men nailed God to the cross, I heard the sound of the hammers, and saw how they raised the cross so that the mob might gaze at the death of the Son of Man.

"And I saw them open His side, and saw how He died. And when I returned from the cross, I cried aloud in pain as ye are now crying, 'Woe! Woe! Lord! Thou art God. Why hast Thou permitted this? Why hast Thou died? Why hast Thou afflicted our hearts, when we believed Thy kingdom would come?'

"But He, our Lord and our God, rose from the dead the third day, and was among us until He entered His kingdom in great glory. And we, conscious of our little faith, were strengthened in heart, and from that time we have been sowing the seed."

Turning to that side whence the first complaint had come, he spoke in a stronger voice:

"Why dost thou complain? God surrendered Himself to torture and death, and ye wish that He should shield ye from it? Oh, people of little faith! Have ye received His teaching? Has he promised ye nothing but life? He comes to you and says to you: 'Come, follow in my path.' He raised you to Himself, and ye fasten your hands to the earth, and call, 'Lord help!' In the presence of God I am dust. But before you I am the Apostle of God, and His Vicar. I say unto you in the name of Christ: There is not death before you, but

life; not torture, but endless joy; not tears and groans, but singing; not slavery, but dominion! I, the Apostle of God, tell thee, O widow, thy son will not die, but will be born into glory, into everlasting life, and thou wilt rejoin him! I promise thee, O father, whose chaste daughter has been assaulted by the executioners, that thou wilt find her whiter than the lilies of Hebron! To you, mothers, bereaved of your children, to you who have lost fathers, to you who complain, to you who must witness the death of your beloved ones, to you who are distressed, unfortunate, disturbed, to you who have to die—in the name of Christ, I tell ye that ye will awake as from sleep to a happier condition and as from night to the light of God. In the name of Christ, let the scales fall from your eyes, and be your hearts inflamed."

He raised his hands as though in command. The hearers felt new blood coursing through their veins, and a shaking up of their bones. Before them was no longer standing a careworn and feeble old man, but a mighty one, who had aroused their souls and lifted them up from dust and terror.

"Amen!" cried several voices.

The light from his eyes was constantly increasing. Power issued from him. When the amen ceased, he continued to speak:

"Ye sow in weeping so that ye may reap in joy. Why then fear the power of evil? Above the earth, above Rome, above the walls of the city is the Lord who dwells with you. The stones will be wet from tears, the sands will be saturated with blood, the valleys will be filled with your bodies; but I say unto you ye will come forth victorious. The Lord will conquer this city of crime, oppression, and haughtiness, and ye are his legions. And as He has redeemed with blood and torture the sins of the world, so He wishes that you should redeem with torture and blood this nest of unrighteousness. He lets you know this through my lips." And Peter spread his arms and fixed his eyes on the heavens. The hearts of the people almost ceased beating in their breasts, for they felt

that he gazed upward because he beheld something invisible to their mortal eyes. His whole face had changed, a serene light illuminated it. For a while he was silent, as if speechless through rapture, but after a moment they heard his voice.

"Thou art here, O Lord! and showest me the way. How can this be, O Christ! Not in Jerusalem but in this city of Satan dost Thou desire to establish Thy Capital? Dost Thou wish to build up Thy Church with these tears and blood? Here, where Nero rules to-day, is Thy eternal Kingdom to stand? O Lord! Lord! And Thou commandest these frightened ones to lay the foundation of the New Holy Zion upon their bones, and Thou commandest my spirit to rule over it and over the peoples of the world? And Thou pourest the fountain of Thy strength upon the weak, so that they are made strong; and now Thou commandest me to feed from here Thy sheep until the consummation of the ages. Oh, be Thou praised in Thy decrees whereby Thou hast ordained victory. Hosanna! Hosanna!"

The timid arose; in the doubters new streams of faith flowed. Some voices shouted "Hosanna!" others "For Christ." Then came silence. The bright summer lightning lit up the interior of the shed and the faces pale from emotion.

Peter, in a trance, prayed for a long time more; but awakening at last he turned upon the group his inspired face, radiant with light, and said:

"See how the Lord hath vanquished doubt in you, so that ye also might go to victory in His name?"

And though he knew that they would conquer, though he knew what would spring from their tears and their blood, nevertheless his voice trembled when he began to bless them with the sign of the Cross.

"And now," he said, "I bless you, my children, for torture, for death, for eternity!"

They gathered around him, calling out: "We are ready, but guard thy holy head for thou art the Vicar of

Christ, performing his office." With these words they grasped his mantle. He then placed his hands on their heads and blessed every one separately as a father blesses children whom he sends on a long journey.

And immediately they began to leave the shed, for they had to hurry to their houses, and from them to the prisons and the arenas. Their thoughts were away from the world, their souls soared towards eternity, and they walked as though in a dream or as in a trance, they were opposing with all the force that was in them, the excruciating force of the "Beast."

Nereus, the servant of Pudens, took the Apostle and led him through a secret path to his house. But in the midst of the clear night Vinitius followed them, and when they, at last, reached the hut of Nereus he threw himself suddenly at the feet of the Apostle.

He recognized him and asked:

"What dost thou wish, my son?"

Vinitius, after what he had heard in the shed, did not dare ask anything. He only embraced the Apostle's feet with both hands and pressed his brow to them. In this dumb fashion, alone, he called for mercy.

"I know," said Peter, " they have taken from thee the maiden whom thou lovest. Pray for her."

"Lord," groaned Vinitius, tightening his embrace upon the feet of the Apostle, "Lord! I am a worm. I am all unworthy, but thou hast known Christ. Do Thou ask Him and stand up in her behalf."

From very anguish he trembled like a leaf. He beat his forehead against the earth. Knowing the Apostle's power, he knew that he alone could restore her to him.

Peter was moved by that anguish. He remembered, how, once, Lygia herself, attacked by Crispus, lay at his feet in the same manner asking for mercy. He remembered, also, that he lifted her and comforted her. So now he raised Vinitius also.

"My dear son," he said, "I will pray for her, but re-

member what I told those doubting ones: that God himself, had passed through torture upon the cross; and remember that after this life another begins—an everlasting one."

"I know! I heard," replied Vinitius, breathing heavily through his pale lips. "But thou seest, master, that I cannot! If blood is wanted ask Christ to accept mine. I am a soldier. Let him torment me, doubly, yea trebly what is prepared for her! She is still a child, master, and I believe that He is mightier than Caesar, mightier! Thou didst love her thyself. Thou hast even blessed her! She is yet an innocent child!"

He bowed again, and putting his face to Peter's knees repeated:

"Thou hast known Christ, master, thou hast known He will listen to thee. Stand up in her behalf!"

Peter closed his eyelids and prayed earnestly.

The summer lightning once more flashed in the sky. In its illumination Vinitius gazed on the Apostle's lips, waiting for the verdict of life or death. The silence was only broken by the calling of the quails in the vineyard, and the distant dull noise of the tread-mills near the Via Salaria.

"Vinitius," said the Apostle at last, "dost thou believe in Him?"

"Master, were it otherwise, would I be here?" answered Vinitius.

"Then believe to the end, for faith moves mountains. Even though thou wert to see the maiden under the sword of the executioner or in the lion's mouth, believe yet, for Christ is able to save. Believe and pray to Him and I will pray with thee."

Then he raised his face toward heaven.

"Merciful Christ," he cried, "look down upon a bruised heart and comfort it. O merciful Christ, moderate the wind to the fleece of the lamb. Merciful Christ, who didst ask the Father to turn away the bitter cup from Thy mouth, turn it away from the mouth of this thy servant. Amen!"

And Vinitius, stretching his hands towards the stars, said, groaning:

"O Christ, I am thine. Take me instead of her!"

In the East the sky began to pale.

CHAPTER XI

Vinitius, on leaving the Apostle, went to the prison with a heart strengthened by faith. In the depth of his soul, terror and despair still clamored for utterance, but he subdued those voices. It seemed to him unlikely that the intercession of the Vicar of God and the power of prayer should be inefficacious. He feared not to hope, he feared only doubt. "I will believe in His loving kindness," he said to himself, "even if I see her in the jaws of the lion." At this thought, though his heart trembled within him, and cold perspiration stood on his temples, he, nevertheless, believed. Each throb of his heart was a prayer. He began to perceive that faith moves mountains, for he felt within himself a certain living strength, which he had never before known. It seemed to him that he could accomplish with it certain things which yesterday would have been impossible. At times he almost believed that the danger had passed. When despair revived in his soul he recalled the memory of that night and of that holy gray face raised to heaven in prayer. "No! Christ will not refuse his first disciple and the shepherd of the flock. Christ will not refuse him, and I do not doubt." And he ran to the prison as a messenger bringing good news.

But there an unusual thing awaited him. All the pretorian guards who served their turn at the Mamertine prison knew him, and usually they did not cause him the slightest trouble. This time, however, the lines did not open, but the centurion approached him, saying:

"Your pardon, noble Tribune, we have an order to-day not to admit anybody."

"An order?" repeated Vinitius, growing pale.

The soldiers looked at him in pity and answered:

"Yes, master, an order from Caesar. There are many sick people in prison, and possibly it is feared that visitors might spread infection through the city."

"But thou didst say that the command was for to-day only."

"The guards change at noon."

Vinitius silently uncovered his head. It seemed to him that the head-dress which he wore was of lead. The soldier came nearer and whispered:

"Be of good cheer, master. The guards and Ursus are watching over her."

He bowed, and quickly drew on the flag stone, with his long Gallic sword, the outline of a fish.

Vinitius looked at him keenly.

"And thou art a pretorian?"

" 'Till I be in there," replied the soldier, pointing at the prison.

"I also worship Christ."

"Praised be His name! I know, master, that I cannot admit thee in the prison, but if thou writest a letter, I will give it to the watch."

"Thanks to thee, brother."

Pressing the soldier's hand he left. The head-dress ceased to weigh upon him like lead. The morning sun had risen over the walls of the prison, and with its radiance, hope entered into the heart of Vinitius. That Christian soldier seemed to him a new witness to the power of Christ. After taking a few steps he halted. Gazing at the rosy clouds above the Capitol and the Temple of Jupiter Stator he exclaimed:

"I have not seen her this day, O Lord, but I have faith in Thy mercy."

Petronius had been waiting for him at home. As usual he had been turning night into day, and so had returned but a little while before. He had succeeded, nevertheless, in taking his bath and anointing himself for sleep.

"I have news for thee," he said. "I was with Tullius Senecio to-day; Caesar was likewise there. I know not how it entered the mind of Augusta to bring little Rufius with her. It may have been to soften the heart of Caesar by his beauty. Unfortunately the child, overpowered by drowsiness, fell asleep during the reading, as did once Vespasian. Seeing this, Bronzebeard threw a cup at the boy and severely wounded him. Poppaea fainted. All heard Caesar exclaim: 'I have had enough of this brood!' and thou knowest that means the same as death."

"God's punishment was hanging over the Augusta," said Vinitius, "but why dost thou tell me this?"

"I tell thee, because the wrath of Poppaea is ever pursuing thee and Lygia. But now, occupied by her own woes, she may discontinue her vengeance and be more readily influenced. I shall see her this evening and speak to her."

"Thanks to thee. Thou hast brought me good news."

"Now bathe and rest. Thy lips are blue and only a shadow of thee remains."

But Vinitius asked:

"Was it announced when the first morning games would take place?"

"In ten days, but they will empty other prisons first. The more time we can gain, the better. All is not yet lost."

But he did not believe in his own words. He well knew that Caesar's high-sounding reply to Aliturus when he compared himself to Brutus had closed all hope of rescue for Lygia. He compassionately held back what he had heard at Senecio's, that Caesar and Tigellinus had resolved to select for themselves and friends the most beautiful Christian maidens and dishonor them before the torture. The others were to be given on the day of the games to the pretorians and the keepers of the animals. Believing that Vinitius would not survive Lygia, he purposely strengthened the hope in his heart. For, first, he sympathized with him deeply, and, secondly, he desired that if Vinitius must die, he should die beautiful and not

with a face emaciated, and darkened by pain and sleeplessness.

"To-day I will speak to Augusta," he said, "somewhat like this: 'Save Lygia for Vinitius, and I will save Rufius for thee.' I will truly think up some plan. One word spoken at the right moment to Bronzebeard may save or destroy any one. At the worst we shall gain time."

"Thanks to thee," repeated Vinitius.

"Thou wilt thank me best when thou hast eaten and rested. By Athene, Odysseus, in his greatest misfortunes, took thought about sleep and food. Thou must have spent the whole night in prison."

"No," answered Vinitius. "I desired to visit the prison a moment ago, but I was met by an order to admit nobody. Inform thyself, dear Petronius, if the decree is only for to-day or till the day of the games."

"I will learn this evening, and to-morrow morning I will tell thee, and for how long the order was given. But now, even if the Sun-god plunged himself into hell for mourning, I must go to sleep. Do thou follow my example."

They separated. Vinitius went to the library and commenced a letter to Lygia. When he had finished, he handed it himself to the Christian centurion, who bore it at once into the prison. He returned shortly with a greeting from Lygia and a promise to secure an answer from her that day. Vinitius did not care to return home in the interim. He sat down on a stone, waiting for the letter from Lygia. The sun had risen high in the heavens, and through the Argentarius quarter, as usual, crowds of people streamed into the Forum. Hucksters cried their wares, conjurers offered their services to the passers-by, citizens strutted to the rostrum to hear the orators, or to discuss the news of the day. As the heat increased the crowds of idlers protected themselves under the porticos of the temples. Underneath them flew flocks of doves fluttering their wings, their white feathers glistening in the light of the sun and the blue sky.

From excess of light, bustle, heat and weariness, Vinitius's eyes began to close. The monotonous shouts of boys playing street games, and the measured tread of the soldiers lulled him to slumber. Several times he aroused himself and looked at the prison. Finally, leaning his head against a slab and breathing like a child, drowsy after prolonged weeping, he fell asleep.

Dreams came. He imagined that in the middle of the night he was bearing Lygia in his arms through an unknown vineyard. Before him walked Pomponia Graecina with a lamp in her hand. A voice like the voice of Petronius called unto him from a distance: "Turn back!" But he did not notice the call and continued in the wake of Pomponia. At last they reached a cottage. Peter was standing on the threshold. He showed Lygia unto Peter and said: "Master, we come from the Arena, but we cannot resuscitate her. Wake her, thou!" Peter answered, "Christ Himself will come to awaken her."

Then the visions grew confused. He saw Nero and Poppaea holding in their hands the little Rufius. The boy's head was bleeding. Petronius was washing it and Tigellinus was sprinkling ashes over the tables laden with costly dishes. Vitelius was devouring these dishes. A multitude of Augustales were sitting at the feast. He himself was resting near Lygia; but between the tables walked lions whose yellow jaws dripped blood. Lygia begged him to take her out, but such a terrible faintness had overcome him that he was unable to move. Then, in his vision he perceived greater disorder, and finally everything fell into complete darkness.

Out of his deep sleep he was aroused by the heat of the sun and by shouts which proceeded from near the place where he was sitting. Vinitius rubbed his eyes. The street was swarming with people. Two runners, in yellow tunics, pushed aside the crowd with long canes, shouting and making room for a magnificent litter which was carried by four powerful Egyptian slaves.

In the litter sat a man dressed in white robes, whose

face could not be well seen, for near his eyes he held a papyrus roll, in whose perusal he was deeply engaged.

"Make way for the noble Augustale," shouted the runners.

The street was so crowded that the litter halted for a moment. Then the Augustale put down his roll of papyrus and stretched out his hand, crying:

"Drive away these rogues! Make haste!" Suddenly he espied Vinitius. He drew back his head and raised the papyrus quickly to his eyes.

Vinitius shaded his forehead with his hand, thinking that he was still dreaming.

In the litter sat Chilo.

Meanwhile, the runners had opened a way. The Egyptians were about to run forward. But suddenly the young Tribune, who in one moment guessed many things which until then had been incomprehensible, approached the litter.

"A greeting to thee, O Chilo!" he said.

"Young man," answered the Greek, with pride and haughtiness, striving to give his face an appearance of calmness which he felt not within his soul, "a greeting to thee, but do not detain me, for I am speeding to my friend, the noble Tigellinus."

Vinitius, grasping the edge of the litter, bent towards him, and looking straight in his eyes, inquired:

"Didst thou betray Lygia?"

"Colossus of Memnon!" cried Chilo, affrighted.

But in the eyes of Vinitius there was no threat, so the terror of the old Greek quickly disappeared. He remembered that he was under the protection of Tigellinus and Caesar himself, a protection before which all must tremble; that he was surrounded by stalwart slaves, and that Vinitius stood before him unarmed, his face emaciated, his form bowed by pain.

At this thought his insolence returned. He fixed his red-lidded eyes upon Vinitius, and whispered:

"And thou, when I was dying of hunger, didst command me to be flogged."

Both remained silent for a moment. Then in a dull voice Vinitius said:

"I wronged thee, Chilo!"

The Greek raised his head, and, snapping his fingers, which in Rome was a sign of contempt, said in a loud voice, so that everybody could hear him:

"Friend, if thou hast a petition to make, come to my home on the Equiline early in the morning, when after my bath I receive guests and clients." And he waved his hand. At that sign the Egyptians who carried the litter, slaves in yellow tunics, brandished their staffs and shouted:

"Make way for the litter of noble Chilo Chilonides! Make way! Way!"

CHAPTER XII

Lygia, in a long but hasty letter, took an eternal farewell of Vinitius. It was known to her that nobody was allowed to enter the prison, and that she could only see him from the arena. Therefore, she begged him to find out when their turn would come, and to be present at the games, for she wished to see him once more in life. There was no sign of fear in her letter. She had written that she and others yearned already for the arena, where they would find freedom from imprisonment. She hoped for the coming of Pomponia and Aulus. She begged that they, too, be present. Every word of hers showed the ecstatic contempt of life in which all the imprisoned lived, and at the same time an unshaken faith that the promises must be fulfilled beyond the grave.

"Whether Christ," she wrote, "free me now or after death, He hath promised me to thee by the mouth of the Apostle; therefore I am thine." She implored him not to grieve for her, and not to permit himself to be afflicted. She did not regard death as a dissolution of marriage. With a child's truthfulness she assured Vinitius that after

the torture in the arena she would tell Christ that her betrothed, Marcus, remained behind in Rome; that he yearned for her with his whole heart. She thought that Christ would permit her soul to return for a while to assure him that she was living, that she did not remember the torture, and that she was happy. Her whole letter breathed happiness and intense hope. There was only one petition connected with earthly affairs—that Vinitius should remove her body from the amphitheatre and bury it as his own wife, in the same tomb where he himself would eventually rest.

He read this letter with a perturbed spirit. At the same time it appeared to him impossible that Lygia should perish by the claws of wild beasts, and that Christ would not have compassion upon her. In that belief were hidden hope and trust. When he returned home he wrote her an answer. He promised to come every day behind the walls of the prison, and wait there and see if Christ would not crush the walls and give her to him. He commanded her to believe that He could deliver her to him even from the circus. The great Apostle had confirmed him in that faith, and the moment of delivery was at hand. The converted centurion was to carry her this letter on the morrow.

When Vinitius went next morning to the prison, the centurion left the ranks, approached him and said:

"Listen to me, master! Christ, who enlightened thee, hath shown thee His favor. Last night Caesar's freedmen and those of the prefect came to select the Christian maidens for dishonor. They asked for thy betrothed, but our Lord sent her a fever from which prisoners often die, and they left her. Yesterday evening she was unconscious, and blessed be the name of the Redeemer, for the same sickness which saved her from dishonor may also save her from death."

Vinitius leaned heavily on the soldier's shoulder, so that he might not fall. The other continued:

"Thank the mercy of God, they have taken and tortured Linus, but, seeing that he was in the last agonies,

they have given him back to his own. Perchance they will now return her to thee, and Christ will heal her."

The young Tribune stood for a while with drooping head; then he raised it, and said in a whisper:

"'Tis so, centurion. Christ, who saved her from dishonor, will also save her from death."

He sat at the wall of the prison until evening. Then he returned home, to send his people for Linus and bring him to one of his suburban villas.

When Petronius had heard everything, he, also, determined to act. First he called on Poppaea. At this second visit he found her at the bed of little Rufius. The child, his head badly bruised, was suffering from fever. With anguish and despair in her heart, his mother had tried all means to save him. Yet she feared that if she did save him, it would be only for a more dreadful death.

Occupied entirely with her own pain, she did not even wish to hear of Vinitius and Lygia. But Petronius terrified her. "Thou hast offended," he said to her, "a new and unknown divinity. It seems that thou, Augusta, art a worshipper of the Hebrew Jehovah, but the Christians maintain that Christ is His Son. Think, then, if the anger of the Father is not pursuing thee? Who knows but it is their vengeance which met thee? Who knows but that the life of Rufius depends on this? How wilt thou act?"

"What dost thou want me to do?" asked the terrified Poppaea.

"Appease the offended deities."

"How?"

"Lygia is sick. Seek to influence Caesar or Tigellinus to give her back to Vinitius."

And she cried out in her despair:

"Thinkest thou that I am able to do this?"

"Thou canst do something else. When Lygia recovers she must meet her doom. Go to the temple of Vesta and command that the head vestal be near the Mamertine at the moment when the prisoners are led to death, and that

she command that the maiden be freed. The head vestal will not refuse thee."

"But if Lygia dies of the fever?"

"The Christians say that Christ is vengeful, but just. Perchance thou wilt propitiate Him by thy wish alone."

"Let Him give me some sign that Rufius will be healed."

Petronius shrugged his shoulders.

"I come not as His envoy, O divinity! I only say this to thee: better be on good terms with all the gods, Roman as well as foreign."

"I will go," said Poppaea, with a broken voice.

Petronius breathed deeply. "At last I have succeeded in something," he thought, and returning to Vinitius, he said:

"Ask thy God that Lygia die not of the fever, for if she does not die, the chief vestal will order her freedom. The Augusta herself will ask her to do it."

Vinitius, looking at him with fever-bright eyes, replied:

"Christ will save her."

Poppaea, who was ready to burn hecatombs to all the gods for the recovery of Rufius, went that same evening through the Forum to the Vestals, leaving the patient in the care of her faithful nurse Silvia, by whom she herself had been reared.

But on the Palatine the sentence had already been issued. Scarcely had the litter of Poppaea disappeared behind the great gate, when two of Caesar's freedmen entered the room where little Rufius rested. One of them threw himself on old Silvia and gagged her; the other seizing a bronze statuette of the Sphinx, stunned her with a single blow. Then they approached Rufius, who, insensible from fever, knew not what was going on around him. He smiled to them and winked his beautiful eyes, as though trying to recognize them. But they, taking the girdle from the nurse, put it around his neck and began to strangle him. The child cried once for his mother, and died easily. Then they wrapped him in a sheet. Mounting horses that awaited, they hastened as far as Ostia, where they threw the body into the sea.

Poppaea, not finding the head virgin, who was with the other vestals at the house of Vatinius, soon returned to the Palatine. She found the bed empty, and beside it the cold body of Silvia. She fainted, and when they restored her she fell to sobbing, and her wild cries were heard during all that night and the following day. But on the third day Caesar commanded her to appear at a feast. She arrayed herself in an amethyst-colored tunic, and came and sat, stony-faced, golden-haired, silent, wonderful, ill-omened as the Angel of Death.

CHAPTER XIII

Before Flavius built the Colosseum, the Roman amphitheatres were mainly constructed of wood. Hence nearly all of them were burned during the conflagration. Nero, however, ordered others to be erected, in anticipation of the promised games. One among them, a gigantic structure, started immediately after the fire, was built of large beams taken from the slopes of the Atlas mountains, and transferred to Rome by sea and Tiber. The games were to surpass all previous records in magnitude, and in the number of victims. Large spaces were provided for spectators and wild beasts. Thousands of mechanics worked night and day, building and embellishing. Stories were told of wonderful pillars inlaid with bronze, amber, ivory, mother-of-pearl and tortoise shells from beyond the seas. Long canals filled with ice cold water from the mountains were to run along the seats to distribute an agreeable coolness through the building during the most intense heat. A gigantic purple awning would give shelter from the rays of the sun. Between the rows of seats were to be placed vessels for the burning of Arabian perfumes. Above the seats would be fixed contrivances to sprinkle the spectators with a spray of saffron and verbena. The famous architects, Severus and Celer, employed their utmost skill in rearing an un-

equalled amphitheatre which should accommodate a greater number of spectators than any hitherto erected.

Hence, on the day set for the first morning game, crowds of idlers waited from early dawn for the opening of the gates. They listened with pleasure to the roars of lions, the hoarse snarling of panthers, and the howling of dogs. For two days food had been withheld from the beasts, though pieces of bloody flesh had been placed in their sight to increase their rage and hunger. At times such a storm of wild voices arose that the people, standing near the circus, could not hear one another's voices. The timid grew pale from fear. With the rising sun came other sounds from within the circus, loud yet peaceful, which were heard with astonishment by the outside listeners, who repeated among themselves: "The Christians! the Christians!" In fact, many had been brought during the night to the amphitheatre, not all from one prison, as previously arranged, but a few from all. The crowd knew that the spectacles would continue for weeks and months, but they disputed among themselves whether the great number of Christians intended for to-day's game could be dispatched in a single day. Voices of men, women and children, singing morning hymns, were so numerous, that the knowing ones maintained that even if one or two hundred people were to be brought into the circus at one time, the beasts would become wearied, sated, and unable to tear them all to pieces before nightfall. Others affirmed that the great number of victims would distract attention, and would not yield proper enjoyment. As the moment approached for the opening of the corridors leading to the interior, the people, in a joyous and animated mood, fell to discussing a thousand subjects concerning the spectacle. Parties were formed who took sides as to the relative strength of the lions or the tigers. Here and there bets were made. Others, however, turned their thoughts to the gladiators who had to appear in the arena in advance of the Christians. So other parties formed, some of whom favored the Samnites and others the Gauls; some the Mirmillons, others the Thraceans.

Still others preferred the net bearers. Early in the morning detachments of a greater or smaller number of gladiators, under the command of masters called "lanistae," began to arrive at the amphitheatre. Not wishing to tire themselves out before the appointed time, they entered unarmed, frequently quite nude, often with green branches in their hands, or garlands of flowers on their heads, young and beautiful in the light of morning, and full of life. Their bodies, glistening from olive oil, were massive as if hewn out of marble. They were trained so as to please the people who were delighted with shapely forms. Many of them were known personally, and every moment cries resounded: "Greetings to thee, Furnius! Greeting to Leo! Greeting to Maximus! Greeting to thee, Diomed!" Young girls fixed upon them eyes full of love. The gladiators singled out the most beautiful, and replied to them jestingly, as though no cares rested upon them, sending kisses and calling aloud: "Embrace me ere death embraces me!" After which they disappeared through the gates, whence many of them never returned. But new batches drew the attention of the crowds. Behind the gladiators came the "mastigophori," or men armed with lashes, whose occupation it was to whip and urge on the fighters. Then mules drew toward the side of the spoliarum long rows of wagons, upon which were piles of wooden coffins. People were elated by this sight, for the many coffins foreshadowed the great number of victims in the games. After these followed people whose occupation it was to kill the wounded in the arena. They were dressed so as to resemble Charon and Mercury. After these came people who kept order in the circus and showed their seats to the spectators, and then came slaves used for carrying food and cooling drinks, and at last the pretorians, whom every Caesar had always on hand in the circus.

At last the vomitoria were opened and the throngs rushed to the centre. But the multitude was so great that it flowed in for hours. It was a wonder that the amphitheatre could hold such a countless throng. The

roars of the wild beasts scenting the exhalations of humanity, grew louder. The people, as they took their places, made an uproar like waves in a storm.

Finally the prefect of the city arrived, surrounded by guards, and after him filed in an unbroken line the litters of senators, consuls, pretorians, ediles, public and imperial officers, pretorians, elders and patricians, and fine ladies. Some litters were preceded by lictors, bearing axes in bundles of rods; others by crowds of slaves. The gilt gleamed in the sunlight, as did the red and white liveries, feathers, earrings, jewels, and the steel of the axes. From the audience loud shouts greeted the arrival of eminent personages. Small detachments of pretorians arrived from time to time.

The priests of the various temples came later, followed by the vestal virgins, and preceded by lictors. And now the appearance of Caesar was the only thing wanted for the games to commence. Unwilling to annoy the audience by overmuch waiting, he arrived without delay, accompanied by Augusta and the Augustales. Petronius was among the latter.

In his litter was Vinitius. The latter knew that Lygia was sick and unconscious, but all access to the prison during the latter days had been strictly forbidden. New guards had been substituted for the old, with strict orders not to speak to the jailors, nor to communicate the least information to such as called to inquire about the prisoners. Hence, he could not be sure that she was not among the victims destined for the first day of the spectacle. A sick, even an unconscious, woman would not be spared from the lions. The victims were to be sewed up in the skins of beasts and sent into the arena in crowds. No spectator could be sure that this or that person might not be among them. Nor could any one of them be recognized. The jailors and all the servants of the amphitheatre had been bribed, however. It had been arranged with the beast-keepers that Lygia should be hidden in some dark corner of the amphitheatre and at night delivered into the hands of a servant, who should take her at

once to the Albanian Hills. Petronius, admitted to the secret, advised Vinitius to go openly with him to the theatre, and, after he had entered, to slip out and mix in with the crowd. Then he should hasten to the pit, and, in order to avoid the possibility of a mistake, should point out Lygia to the guards.

The guards admitted him through a small door, through which they themselves had emerged. One of them, Syrus by name, led him at once to the Christians. On the way Syrus said:

"I know not, master, if thou wilt find whom thou art seeking. We inquired for a maiden named Lygia. Nobody gave us an answer. It may be they do not trust us."

"Are there many of them?" asked Vinitius.

"Yea, master, but a number must wait until tomorrow."

"Are there any sick among them?"

"None who could not stand on their feet."

With these words Syrus opened a door and entered into a spacious room, but low and dark. Gleams of light penetrated in it only through grated openings. At first Vinitius could see nothing. He heard only the murmur of voices and the shouts of people proceeding from the amphitheatre. But after his eyes had accustomed themselves to the darkness, he saw groups of strange beings in the guise of wolves and bears. They were Christians sewed up in skins of beasts. Some were standing, others on their knees prayed. Here and there, by the long hair which flowed over the skin, one might discern that the victim was a woman. Mothers, resembling wolves, carried in their arms children sewed up likewise in hairy covering. But from beneath the skins appeared bright faces, eyes which in the darkness beamed with delight or with fever. It was evident that one thought dominated the greater part of those people—a thought above all earthly considerations, so that, while still among the living, they were unmindful of all that happened around them, or that might befall them. Some of whom Vinitius

inquired looked on him with staring eyes, as if newly awakened from sleep, and answered nothing. Others smiled at him, placing a finger to their lips, or pointing to the iron grating through which entered bright beams of light. Here and there, children were crying, terrified by the roars of the wild beasts, the howling of the dogs, the uproar of the people and the likeness to wild beasts borne by their own parents. Vinitius, walking beside Syrus, scanned every face, searching, inquiring. At times he stumbled over the bodies of those who had fainted in the throng from the suffocating heat. He pushed on further into the dark depths of the room, which seemed to be as spacious as the whole amphitheatre.

Suddenly he stopped. It seemed to him that near the grating he heard a voice known to him. Listening for a while, he turned, pushed through the crowd, and approached the sound. The dim rays of light fell on the head of the speaker, and Vinitius recognized, under the wolf's skin, the emaciated and inexorable face of Crispus.

"Mourn for your sins," cried Crispus, "for the hour is at hand. Those who think that death will ransom sins, commit a new sin and will be cast into everlasting fire. By all the sins which ye have committed in my life ye have renewed the suffering of the Lord. How dare ye, then, think that the life which awaits ye will ransom sin? To-day the righteous and the sinner will die together, but the Lord will distinguish His own. Woe to you! The claws of the lions will rend your bodies but not your sins, nor square your accounts with God. The Lord showed sufficient mercy, when He permitted Himself to be nailed to the cross; but from now on He will be only the Judge, who will leave no sin unpunished nor in arrears.

"Moreover, whoever thinks that torture will blot out his sin, blasphemes against divine justice and only sinks deeper into sin. Mercy is at an end. The hour of God's wrath hath arrived. Soon ye will stand before the awful Judge, before whom even the righteous can scarcely be justified. Bewail your sins, for the mouth of Hell is

open, and woe to you, husbands and wives! Woe to you, parents and children."

Stretching out his bony hands, he shook them above the bent heads, unterrified and inexorable even in the presence of the death, which in a little while all the condemned must meet. After he concluded voices were heard: "We bewail our sins!" Then came silence, only broken by the crying of children, and the beating of hands against the breast. The blood of Vinitius curdled in his veins. He, who had placed all his hope in the mercy of Christ, now heard, that the day of wrath was at hand, and that mercy could not be obtained, even by death in the arena. Through his head flashed, quick as lightning, the thought that the Apostle Peter would have spoken otherwise to those about to die. Yet the terrible fanaticism of the words of Crispus, the dark room with its grating, beyond which lay the field of torture, the nearness of it all, and the crowd of victims already destined for death, filled his soul with terror. All these things taken together seemed to him terrible, a hundredfold more horrible than the bloodiest battles in which he had ever taken part. The bad air and the heat stifled him. Cold perspiration bedewed his forehead. He feared lest he might faint like those upon whose bodies he had stumbled, when beginning his search in the depths of the room. But when he remembered that at any moment the grating might be opened, he began to call aloud for Lygia and Ursus, in the hope that if not they, then some one of their acquaintance, might answer.

And, in fact, a man wrapped in a bear's skin, pulled him by his toga and said:

"Lord, they remained behind in the prison. I was the last whom they led out, and I saw her lying sick on the couch."

"Who art thou?" inquired Vinitius.

"I am the quarryman in whose hut the Apostle baptized thee. They imprisoned me three days ago, and today I die."

Vinitius breathed more freely. When he entered, he had expected to find Lygia. But now he was ready to thank Christ, that she was not there, and beheld therein a sign of His mercy.

Meanwhile, the quarryman pulled his toga again and said:

"Dost thou remember, master, that I conducted thee to the vineyard of Cornelius, where the Apostle preached in the shed?"

"I remember," answered Vinitius.

"I saw him later on the day before they imprisoned me. He blessed me, and said that he would come to the amphitheatre to bless the perishing. I should like to look at him at the moment I die and see the sign of the cross. It would then be easier for me to die. If thou knowest, master, where he is, tell me."

Vinitius lowered his voice and said:

"He is among the people of Petronius disguised as a slave. I know not where they have chosen their places, but I will return to the circus and see. Look thou at me. When ye enter into the arena, I will arise and turn my head toward the side where he is. Thou wilt find him with thine eyes."

"I thank thee, master, and peace be with thee."

"May the Redeemer be merciful to thee."

"Amen."

Vinitius went out and entered the amphitheatre, where he took his place near Petronius in the midst of the other Augustales.

"Is she there?" asked Petronius.

"She is not there, they left her in prison."

"Hear what has occurred to me, but whilst thou art listening look at Nigidia, for example, so that it may appear as though we were talking of her headgear. Tigellinus and Chilo are watching us at this moment. Listen again; let them put Lygia in a coffin and carry her out of the prison as a corpse. Thou canst guess the rest."

"Yes," answered Vinitius.

Further conversation was interrupted by Tullius Senecio, who, bending toward them, asked:

"Do you know whether they will arm the Christians?"

"We do not know," answered Petronius.

"I should wish that arms were given to them," said Tullius, "if not, the arena will soon become like a butcher's shambles. But what a splendid amphitheatre!"

Truly the scene was magnificent. The lower seats, crowded with Senators in their togas, were white as snow. In a gilded box sat Caesar, wearing a diamond collar and a golden wreath. At his side sat the beautiful but gloomy Augusta. Around him were vestal virgins, great officials, Senators with embroidered mantles, officers of the army with glittering weapons. In a word, all there was in Rome of power, brilliancy and wealth sat there. In the farther rows sat knights. Higher up was a sea of heads. These were the common people. Above them, from pillar to pillar, hung garlands made of roses, lilies, ivy and grapevines. People talked aloud, called to one another, sang and, at times, burst out in laughter at some jest sent from row to row, or stamped impatiently for the beginning of the spectacle.

The stamping became uproarious at last. Then the prefect of the city, who, with a retinue of brilliant followers, had already ridden around the arena, gave the signal with a handkerchief. It was answered from the amphitheatre with exclamations of "Aaa!" escaping from thousands of breasts. The games usually began with lions or other wild beasts pitted against various barbarians from the North and South. But this time beasts were not considered of sufficient account. The initial performance was given by gladiators called Andabates, that is, men wearing helmets without eye-openings. Their name signified "blindfolded." Scores of them entered the arena and together began to shake their swords in the air. The scourgers pushed them towards one another with long forks. The connoisseurs in the audience looked upon such proceeding with contempt, but the crowd was pleased with the quaint motions of the

fencers. When the combatants happened to meet shoulder to shoulder, they laughed aloud, calling out, "To the right!" "To the left!" "Front." This was frequently and intentionally done to mislead the opponents. However, a number of pairs closed in, and the fight grew bloody. Then the clutching combatants cast aside their shields, and, extending their left hands to one another, so as not to be separated again, they fought to the death. Whoever fell, raised his fingers, a sign that he begged for mercy. But at the beginning of the spectacle, the audience usually demanded death for the wounded, especially for those who were blindfolded, and who were comparatively unknown to them. The number of the combatants was slowly reduced. When at last only two remained and were pushed together so that they should meet each other, both fell on the sand and stabbed each other reciprocally. Then amid cries of "It is finished!" slaves removed the corpses, while boys raked away the blood-stained sand in the arena and spread it over with crocus leaves.

A more important fight which was to follow aroused the attention not only of the rabble, but also of the better class of connoisseurs. Young patricians offered enormous bets, many risking all they had. From hand to hand were passed tablets upon which were written the names of the favorites and also the amount of sesterces which each bet on his choice. The established champions, who had already won their laurels, found most backers. But there were among the betters many who posted considerable sums on new and unknown gladiators, hoping to win immense sums in case of success. All bet; even Caesar himself. The priests, vestal virgins, senators, knights, and the people bet. Some of the crowd who had no money, often wagered their own freedom. Then they waited with agonized anxiety upon the issue of the fight, more than one loudly appealing for the protection of his favorite.

When the shrill voice of the trumpets was heard, silence reigned in the amphitheatre. Thousands of eyes turned

towards the great bolts, which a man approached dressed like Charon. Amid general silence, he knocked thrice upon the door with a hammer, as if calling to death those who were hid behind them. Then the two halves of the gate opened slowly, revealing a black gully whence the gladiators poured out into the bright arena. They came in divisions of twenty-five—Thracians, Mirmillons, Samnites, Gauls, all heavily armed. In their rear followed the net-bearers, holding in one hand a net and in the other a trident. At sight of them, applause broke out here and there on the benches, to change speedily into an immense continuous storm. From top to bottom, flushed faces were seen and clapping hands and open mouths whence issued loud shouts. The gladiators paraded the entire arena with even wiry steps, their rich gilt weapons glittering in the sun. Before Caesar's box they halted, proud, calm, and brilliant. The shrill clamor of a horn silenced the applause. The combatants, lifting their right hands, and turning their heads and eyes towards Caesar, chanted in a monotonous sing-song:

"Hail Caesar, the Emperor!

"We who art about to die, salute thee."

Then they separated quickly, each occupying the place assigned to him in the arena. They were to fall on one another in whole sections. But at first the most renowned combatants were permitted to engage in single combats, wherein strength, dexterity, and courage were best exhibited.

From amongst the Gauls, appeared a champion, well known to frequenters of the amphitheatre under the name of "Butcher." He had been a victor in many games. With a huge helmet on his head and a coat of mail fastened in front of his powerful breast, and behind, he looked in the golden light of the arena like a giant gold beetle. The equally powerful net-bearer Calendio appeared against him.

The spectators began to bet.

"Five hundred sesterces on the Gaul."

"Five hundred on Calendio!"

"By Hercules, a thousand!"

"Two thousand."

Meanwhile the Gaul had reached the centre of the arena. He slowly backed away, a pointed sword in his hand. Lowering his head he carefully watched his opponent through the opening of his visor. The light and well-formed net-bearer, naked, save for a belt around his loins, circled nimbly around his antagonist, waving his net gracefully, lowering or raising his trident, and singing the customary song of the net-bearer.

"I do not seek thee, I seek a fish.
Why dost thou flee from me, oh, Gaul?"

But the Gaul was not fleeing. He soon stopped, and, standing in one place, began to turn slowly so as to keep his enemy always in sight. In his form and enormous head was now something terrible. The spectators fully understood that the heavy man encased in bronze was preparing for a sudden leap which would decide the battle. The net-bearer, meanwhile sprang up to him, then sprang back, handling his trident so dexterously that the spectators could with difficulty follow his motions. The sound of the trident's teeth striking the shield was repeatedly heard. Yet the Gaul did not quail, thus demonstrating gigantic strength. All his attention seemed to be concentrated, not on the trident, but on the net continually circling above his head like a bird of ill omen. The spectators held their breath as they followed the masterly play of the gladiators. The Butcher bided his time, then rushed upon his enemy. The latter with equal speed shot past his sword, raised his arms, straightened himself and threw the net.

The Gaul, turning where he stood, caught the net on his shield. Then both sprang aside. From the amphitheatre thundered the shouts of "Macte!" On the lower rows new bets were made. Caesar, himself, who, from the beginning had been talking to the vestal virgin, Rubria, and up to this time had paid little attention, now turned his head toward the arena. Now they began to struggle again, with such uniformity and precision, that it

seemed as though they cared not for life or death, but only for the exhibition of their skill. The Butcher escaped twice more from the net, and again retreated towards the border of the arena. Then those who had bet against him, not wishing him to rest, began to shout, "Attack!" The Gaul obeyed and attacked. The net-bearer's arm was suddenly covered with blood and his net dropped. The Gaul gathered up all his strength and leaped forward to deliver the finishing stroke. But at that instant, Calendio, who had intentionally made it appear as though he could no longer manage the net, bent aside, thus evading the thrust and ran his trident between the knees of his opponent, bringing him down. The Butcher strove to rise, but in the twinkling of an eye, the fatal meshes closed over him, and with every motion he entangled still more his powerful hands and legs. Repeated stabs of the trident pinned him to the ground. Once more he raised himself by his arm, and endeavored to rise, but in vain. Lifting to his head his weakened hand, which could no longer hold the sword, he fell on his back. Calendio pressed his neck down to the ground with the teeth of his fork and, leaning with both hands on its hilt, turned towards Caesar's box.

The whole circus trembled with the applause and the roar of the people. Those who had bet on Calendio held him, at that moment, greater than Caesar himself. But this fact banished all hatred towards the Gaul, for, at the cost of his own blood, their purses were to be filled. The wishes of the people were divided. On all the benches signs were shown; half of them were for death and half for mercy. But the net-bearer only looked to where sat Caesar and the vestals, waiting for their decision.

Unfortunately, Nero hated the Butcher, for at the last game before the fire he had bet against him with Licinus and lost a considerable sum. He therefore stretched out his hand and turned down his thumb.

The vestals repeated the sign at once. Calendio knelt on the breast of the Gaul, pulled out a short knife from

his belt, drew aside the armor around the neck of his opponent, and ran the three-edged knife into his throat up to the hilt.

"It is finished!" resounded from all sides of the amphitheatre.

The Butcher quivered for a moment like a stabbed ox, dug the sand with his feet, stretched, and ceased to move. There was no need for Mercury to try with a heated iron if he were yet alive. He was disentangled from the net. Other couples appeared. After them, whole detachments fought in battles. The audience took part in them with soul, heart, and eyes. Howlings, roarings, whistlings, applause and laughter urged on the combatants to madness. On the arena the gladiators, dividing into two companies, fought with the fury of wild beasts. Breast struck breast, bodies were intertwined in deadly embrace, strong limbs cracked in their sockets. Swords were driven into breasts and stomachs. Pale lips spat blood upon the sand. Many novices were seized with sudden fear, so that they fled away from the confusion, but the scourgers drove them back again with lead-tipped lashes. On the sand formed great dark spots. An increasing number of dead, naked, and armed bodies lay stretched out like sheaves of corn, whereon the living still kept up the fight. They stumbled against armor and shields, cut their feet with the broken blades of weapons, and fell. The crowd lost its self-possession in pure delight. Intoxicated with death, they sated their eyes with the sight of it, and drew into their lungs its exhalations with delight. Of the conquered, almost all lay dead. A mere handful of the wounded knelt in the middle of the arena, and tremblingly stretched out their hands to the audience, praying for mercy. The victors were rewarded with wreaths and olive branches. A moment of rest followed, which at the command of the all-powerful Caesar changed into a feast. Perfumes were burned in vases. Sprinklers sprayed upon the people saffron and violet water. Cooling refreshments were brought—roasted meat, sweet cakes, olives and fruit. The people ate,

talked and shouted in honor of Caesar, to incline him to greater liberality. Then, when they had appeased their hunger and quenched their thirst, hundreds of slaves brought baskets full of gifts, from which boys, dressed as cupids, took various things in both hands and threw them among the people. With the appearance of lottery tickets in the distribution, a scuffle began. People pushed, upset and trampled on one another. They cried for help, jumped over rows of seats, stifled one another in the terrible throng. For whoever captured a lucky number might win a house and garden, a slave, a fine habit, or a wild beast, which he could afterwards sell to the amphitheatre. This was the frequent cause of disorders so great that very often the pretorians were obliged to interfere and restore order. After each distribution, people were carried out with broken limbs, and some were trampled to death in the crowd.

But the rich took no part in the scramble for lottery tickets. The Augustales now amused themselves with the sight of Chilo—making vain efforts to show that he could look on fighting and bloodshed as undisturbed as anybody. From the beginning, the unfortunate Greek had begun to wrinkle his brow, bite his lips, and squeeze his fists so that the nails entered his flesh. His Greek nature and his personal cowardice equally unfitted him to bear such a sight. His face paled, his brows were covered with drops of perspiration, his lips became blue, his eyes sunk, his teeth chattered, and his body trembled. At the end of the fight he recovered somewhat, but when they showered jests upon him, he was seized with sudden anger, and defended himself desperately.

"Ha, Greek! The sight of the tearing of human skin was unbearable," said Vatinius, pulling him by the beard.

Chilo exposed his last two yellow teeth, and snarled out:

"As my father was not a shoemaker, I cannot mend it."

"Well done! He had hit it!" answered several voices, but others continued the rallying.

"It is not his fault that instead of a heart he has a piece of cheese in his breast!" cried Senecio.

"Neither is it thy fault that instead of a head thou hast a bladder," answered Chilo.

"Perchance thou wilt become a gladiator. Thou wouldst look well with a net in the arena."

"Should I happen to catch thee with it, I should catch stinking carrion."

"And how would it fare with the Christians?" asked Festus of Liguria. "Wouldst thou not like to be a dog, so that thou mightest bite them?"

"I would not wish to be thy brother."

"Thou Maeotian copper-nose!"

"Thou Ligurian mule!"

"Evidently thy skin is itching, but I do not advise thee to ask me to scratch it."

"Scratch thyself. If thou scratch thy pimple, thou wilt destroy the best in thee."

In such fashion they attacked him, and thus he defended himself viciously, amid general laughter. Caesar, clapping his hands, repeated "Good!" and urged them on.

Then Petronius approached. Touching the Greek's side with his ivory cane, he said:

"'Tis well, philosopher, but in one thing only thou errest. The gods made thee a pickpocket, but thou hast become a demon, and therefore thou canst not bear it."

The old man gazed at him with his reddened eyes. This time he was not ready with an insulting reply. After a silence, he said, lamely enough:

"I shall endure!"

Meanwhile, the trumpets announced the end of the intermission. The people began to leave the passage where they had assembled to stretch out their limbs and hold converse. A general movement began, with the wonted dispute about seats previously occupied. Senators and patricians hurried to their places. The noise ceased at last and the amphitheatre returned to order. On the arena was a crowd of people engaged in digging out here and there lumps composed of sand and blood.

The turn of the Christians arrived. This was quite a new spectacle to the people. No one could foresee how they would comport themselves. All awaited them with a certain curiosity, expectant of something unusual. So here were the incendiaries of Rome, the destroyers of its ancient treasures! They had drunk the blood of infants and poisoned the waters, they had cursed the whole human race, and committed the most heinous atrocities. The greatest punishments were not great enough for their crimes. What the people feared was that the tortures provided for the Christians might fall below the enormity of their guilt.

Meanwhile, the sun had risen high, and its rays, passing through the purple awning, filled the amphitheatre with a bloody light. The sand assumed a fiery color. There was something terrible in those gleams of light, in the inflamed faces of the people, and in the very arena, empty now, but soon to be crowded with people and savage beasts. Death and terror pervaded the air. The throng, usually joyous, grew sullen under the influence of their hate. Their faces wore angry expressions.

The prefect gave a sign. Charon, he who had summoned the gladiators to death, reappeared, and, walking with steady steps around the arena, amid perfect silence, struck three times with a hammer on the door. Throughout the amphitheatre ran a deep murmur.

"The Christians! The Christians!"

The iron gratings creaked. From the dark openings came the usual cry of the scourgers:

"To the sand!"

The next moment the arena was peopled with satyr-like groups, covered with skins. All ran quickly, feverishly, and when they reached the middle of the circus, fell on their knees together and raised their hands. The people, conceiving this to be a prayer for pity, began to stamp, whistle, and throw empty wine vessels and clean-picked bones, vociferating: "The beasts! The beasts!"

Then an unexpected thing happened. From the midst

of the shaggy group voices were heard in song. For the first time in the Roman circus the hymn arose:

"Christus regnat!" (Christ reigns.)

Astonishment fell upon the people. The victims sang with eyes raised to the awning. The spectators saw pale faces full of ecstasy. It was plain enough now that these people were not craving mercy. Apparently, they saw neither the circus nor the people, neither the senate, nor Caesar. "Christ reigns!" sounded louder, and the spectators all the way to the topmost rows inquired of themselves: "What is going on, and who is that Christus who reigns, as is asserted by these people about to die?"

Meanwhile another grating opened. Into the arena rushed dogs, madly barking, great packs of dogs—huge yellow Molossians from the Peloponnesus, pied dogs from the Pyrenees, and wolf-like dogs from Ireland, all purposely famished. Lean, with bloodshot eyes, their barks and howls filled the amphitheatre.

The Christians, having finished their songs, remained on their knees, motionless as statues of stone, only repeating with doleful intonation, "For Christ! For Christ!" The dogs scented human beings beneath the animal skins. Surprised at their silence, however, they did not venture at first to throw themselves on the martyrs. Some leaned against the walls of the boxes, as though they intended to go among the spectators; others ran around barking furiously, as if chasing some invisible enemy. The people were angry. A thousand voices shrieked, some roaring like beasts, others barking, others urging on the dogs in various languages. The maddened dogs would run against the kneeling Christians, only to draw back again, gnashing their teeth. Finally, one of the Molossians drove his fangs into the skin-covered shoulder of a woman kneeling in front and dragged her under him.

At this a number of dogs threw themselves upon the Christians. The mob ceased its tumult, to observe the better. Amid the canine howling and snarling, the plaintive voices of men and women crying, "For Christ!

For Christ!" were still audible. The arena was now a quivering mass of dogs and people. Blood streamed from the torn bodies. Dogs snatched from one another bloody members of the human body. The odor of blood and torn entrails was stronger than the Arabian perfumes, and filled the whole circus. At last, only here and there were to be seen a few kneeling forms. But even these soon changed into squirming masses.

Vinitius, at the first entry of the Christians, had arisen and turned his head, according to his agreement with the quarryman, to that side where Peter sat among Petronius's people. He now sat gazing with glassy eyes at the awful spectacle. At first he feared that the quarryman might have been mistaken, and that Lygia might be among the victims. This thought benumbed his heart. But when he heard the voices crying "For Christ!"—when he witnessed the torture of so many victims, who, dying, acknowledged their faith and their God—he could not drive back other feelings which pierced him with the most poignant agony. If Christ Himself had died in torture, if thousands were following Him, if a sea of blood was to be poured out, what mattered one little drop more? Would it not be almost a sin to ask for mercy? That thought came to him from the arena, pervaded with the groans of the dying and the odor of their blood. None the less he prayed on and repeated through his parched lips: "O Christ! O Christ! Thy Apostle hath prayed for her." Then he forgot himself, and lost consciousness of his surroundings. It seemed to him only that the blood on the arena was rising, and would soon overflow the whole city of Rome. He was deaf now to everything, to the howling of the dogs, the clamor of the people and the voices of the Augustales, who suddenly called out: "Chilo has fainted!"

"Chilo has fainted!" repeated Petronius, turning towards the place where the Greek sat.

He really had fainted. He sat there, as white as a sheet, his head thrown backwards, his mouth wide open, in corpselike immobility. At that very moment, new

victims sewed up in skins were being driven into the arena.

They knelt immediately in the same manner as their predecessors. But the worn-out dogs were loath to rend them. Only a few threw themselves on those kneeling near by. Others lay down, and, opening their bloody jaws, scratched their sides and yawned wearily.

The audience, restless in soul, but drunk and maddened with blood, began shouting with shrill voices:

"Lions! Lions! Let loose the lions!"

The lions had been destined for the following day. But in the amphitheatre the people's will was paramount even over Caesar's. Caligula alone, arrogant and fickle-minded, dared to oppose them. There were times when he gave orders to beat the crowd with sticks, but even he was often obliged to give way. Nero, however, to whom applause was dearer than anything else in the world, never opposed them. This time he was more lenient than ever, because he wished to appease the angry crowd and lay upon the Christians the blame for the conflagration.

Therefore he gave the signal for the opening of the lions' dens, an act which calmed the people immediately. The creaking of the gates was heard. The dogs, at sight of the lions, huddled together, whimpering, on the opposite side of the ring. The lions stalked into the arena, one after another. They were tawny monsters, with shaggy heads. Even Caesar turned towards them his weary face, and placed the emerald to his eye to see better. The Augustales greeted them with applause. The crowd counted them on their fingers, eager at the same time to note the impression which the lions would make on the Christians, who, kneeling in the centre, again repeated the words "For Christ! For Christ!"

But the lions, though hungry, did not hasten towards the victims. The red gleam on the arena had dazzled them, so that they half closed their eyes. Some stretched their yellow bodies lazily, others opened their jaws and

yawned, as if to show the spectators their terrible teeth. But soon the odor of blood and the torn bodies, a number of which still lay on the arena, appealed to them. They became restless; their manes rose; their nostrils drew in the air with a snort. One of them made a sudden dash on the body of a woman with a torn face. Lying with his fore-paws on the body, he licked the coagulated blood with his rough tongue. Another approached a Christian holding in his arms a child sewed up in a fawn's skin.

The child shivered and wept, convulsively embracing his father's neck, who, wishing to prolong the infant's life, if only for a moment, endeavored to tear it away so that he might hand it over to those kneeling farther on. The noise and movement excited the lion. He emitted a short, sharp roar, killed the child with one blow of his paw, caught the father's head between his jaws, and crushed it in the twinkling of an eye.

This was the signal for all the other lions to fall upon the Christians. Some women could not restrain cries of terror. The cries were drowned in the applause. This soon ceased. The desire to see overcame everything else. Then began terrible scenes. Heads disappeared entirely in the lions' jaws. Breasts were opened by one blow of the paw. Hearts and lungs were dragged out. The crunching of bones was heard under the fangs of the lions, who, seizing the victims by the sides or back, ran around with mad leaps, as though in search of hiding places wherein to devour them undisturbed. Other lions fought together, rearing on their hind legs, clasping one another with their paws like wrestlers, filling the amphitheatre with thunderous roars. Some of the audience stood up, others left their seats to reach the lower parts of the rows for a closer view. Many were crowded to death. It seemed as though the excited spectators would end by throwing themselves into the arena, to join the lions in tearing the Christians. At times unearthly noises were heard, at others applause; then came roaring and

rumbling, the gnashing of teeth, the howling of the Molossian dogs. And, at intervals, only the groaning of the martyrs could be heard.

Caesar, holding the emerald to his eye, renewed his attention. Petronius assumed an expression of disgust and contempt. Chilo had already been borne out of the circus. Fresh victims were driven into the pit.

From the upper tier of seats the Apostle Peter looked on. No one saw him, for all had their heads turned toward the arena. He rose to his feet, and, as once before, in the vineyard of Cornelius, he had blessed for death and eternity the hunted fugitives, so now he blessed with the sign of the cross those who were in the clutches of the wild beasts; blessed their blood, their torture, their dead bodies changed into shapeless lumps, their souls flying upward from the blood-soaked sand. Some of the martyrs raised their eyes to him. Their faces brightened up with a smile as they caught sight of the sign of the cross high above them. But Peter's heart was torn as he cried out:

"O Lord, Thy will be done! For Thy glory, for the testimony of the truth, these my sheep are perishing. Thou hast commanded me to feed them. For this reason I give them to Thee. Yea! To Thee! Count them, O Lord! Take them, heal their wounds, assuage their pain, let their recompense be far greater than their torture!"

And he blessed one after another, group after group, with loving compassion, as of a father surrendering his own children into the hands of Christ. Then Caesar, spurred by madness or the desire that the spectacle should surpass all others ever seen in Rome, whispered a few words to the prefect of the city, who thereupon left Caesar's box and went at once to the dens. Even the populace were astonished when next moment they heard again the sound of the opening of the gates. And now all kinds of wild beasts were let out—tigers from the banks of the Euphrates, panthers from Numidia, bears, wolves, hyenas and jackals. The whole arena seemed

turned into moving billows of striped, yellow, fallow, black, brown and spotted skins. Then followed confusion, in which the eye could distinguish nothing save the horrible turning and twisting of the backs of the wild beasts. The spectacle lost the aspect of reality, and turned into an orgy of blood, a terrible dream, a prodigious panorama of bewildered fancy. All records were surpassed. Above the roars and howlings and yells, rose, shrill and piercing, the hysteric laughter of women, whose nerves had given way under the strain. The people were horrified; their faces grew dark, and voices were heard saying:

"Enough! Enough!"

But it was easier to let loose the beasts than to beat them back. Caesar, however, found a means of clearing the arena, and starting a new amusement for the people. In all sections, in the midst of the benches, appeared detachments of black Numidians, adorned with feathers and earrings, with bows in their hands. The people guessed what was coming, and greeted the archers with a shout of satisfaction. The Numidians approached the circle, adjusted their arrows to the strings, and shot them into the crowd of beasts. That was indeed a new spectacle! Their shapely black bodies bending backwards, stretched the elastic bows and dispatched shaft after shaft. The snapping of the strings and the whistling of the feathery darts mingled with the howling of the wild beasts and the shouts of admiration from the spectators. Wolves, bears, panthers, and such of the martyrs as were still living, fell side by side. Here and there a lion, feeling a dart in his side, turned suddenly, with mouth wrinkled from rage, trying to snatch and break the shaft. Other lions groaned from pain. The smaller beasts, panic-stricken, ran aimlessly around the arena, or thrust their heads between the gratings. Meanwhile, the arrows whizzed on, till every living thing went down in the last agony of death.

Then hundreds of slaves streamed into the arena, armed with spades, shovels, brooms, wheelbarrows,

baskets for carrying out entrails, and sacks of sand, crowd after crowd of them, and over the whole circle there was a seething, feverlike activity. The space was soon cleared of corpses, blood, and refuse, was dug over, made even, and spread with thick layers of new sand. Cupids ran in, scattering rose leaves, lilies, and various other flowers. The censers were lighted again, and the awning was removed. For the sun was now sinking.

The crowd looked at one another with surprise, asking what new spectacle was still in store for them. And indeed it was a spectacle which none had expected. Caesar, who some time before had left his box, appeared suddenly on the flower-strewn arena, arrayed in a golden mantle and crowned with a golden wreath. He was followed by twelve choristers, with lutes in their hands. In his own hand he held a silver lute. Advancing with solemn step to the centre, he bowed his head several times, raised his eyes toward the sky, and remained in that posture for a while, as though waiting for inspiration.

Then he struck the strings and began to sing:

I

Oh, radiant son of Leto,
Ruler of Tenedos, Chios and Chrysos,
Art thou he who guards over
The sacred city of Ilion,
Couldst thou yield to Achaian anger
To bespatter the sacred altars
Burning continually in thy worship
With Trojan blood?
The aged raise trembling hands to thee.

II

Oh, thou silver-bowed, far-reaching archer,
To thee, mothers from the depths of their bosoms
Lift up tearful voices
To have pity on their children,
Complaints that would move a stone.
But thou wert less feeling than a stone,
Oh, Smintheus, to the people's woes!

The song passed gradually into a plaintive recital full of pain and doleful as an elegy. Silence reigned in the circus. After a while Caesar himself was touched, and he resumed his song:

III

Thou art able with thy divine sounds
To silence the lament of the heart
When the eye is yet to-day
Filled with tears as a rose with dew,
At the doleful sounds of thy songs.
Who can rescue from dust and ashes
The conflagration and calamity of that day—
Smintheus! where wert thou then?

His voice quivered, and his eyes moistened. On the eyelids of the vestals tears appeared. The people listened in silence, which was followed by prolonged applause.

Meanwhile, from the outside, through the opening of the dens, were heard the creaking of the wheels upon which the bleeding parts of the Christians—men, women and children—were to be taken to the dreadful places known as the Putrid Pits.

The Apostle Peter seized his white, trembling head with both hands, and groaned in spirit:

"Lord! Lord!" he cried, "to whom hast Thou given dominion over the world? Why wilt Thou establish Thy capital in this place?"

CHAPTER XIV

Meanwhile the sun descended towards its setting, appearing to melt in the red of the evening. The spectacle was at an end. The crowd began to quit the amphitheatre for the city, through the gates called Vomitoria. The Augustales were the only ones who tarried. They re-

mained for the sea-like crowd to pass. A large number of them left their seats and proceeded to the box, where Caesar showed himself anew, eager for their praises. The public had not applauded him immediately after the termination of his song as much as he had expected. This was not enough for him. He had expected enthusiasm bordering on frenzy. Vainly now did hymns of praise sound in his ears; the vestals kissed his divine hand in vain, while Rubria bowed so low that her red hair touched his breast. Nero was not satisfied, and could not hide his chagrin. He was both astonished and disquieted because Petronius kept silent. Praises or favorable criticism from his mouth would have afforded great comfort at that moment. Finally, unable to restrain himself, Caesar beckoned to him and said:

"Tell me."

Petronius answered calmly:

"I am silent because I can find no words. Thou hast surpassed thyself."

"So it seemed to me. But that crowd of people!"

"Canst thou expect mongrels to be judges of poetry?"

"But thou also hast noticed that they did not thank me as much as I deserved."

"Because thou hast chosen a bad moment."

"Why?"

"When their brains were affected by the odor of blood and they were unable to listen attentively."

Nero clenched his fists and answered:

"Ah, those Christians! they burned Rome and hurt me now. What new punishment should I devise for them?"

Petronius perceived that he had taken the wrong track, and that his words had produced an effect opposite to his intentions. In order to divert Caesar's mind into another channel, he bent to him and whispered:

"Thy song is wonderful, but I will venture one remark. In the fourth line of the third strophe, the metre left something to be desired."

Nero, blushing with shame, as though he had been

caught in an infamous act, looked alarmed, and answered, also in a whisper:

"Thou observest everything! I know! I will write it again. But has any one else noticed it? No? I command thee to tell it to nobody if life is dear to thee."

Upon this Petronius furrowed his brow, and answered as though he were vexed and disaffected.

"Thou mayest, O divinity, condemn me to death, if I deceive thee, but do not terrify me. The gods know best if I fear thee."

Saying this he looked straight into Caesar's eyes, who, after a while returned:

"Be not angry, thou knowest that I love thee."

"A bad sign," thought Petronius.

"I wish to invite thee to-day to a feast," continued Nero. "But I wish first to lock myself in and polish the cursed fourth line of the third strophe. Seneca, and, perchance, Secundus Carinus, may have noticed it as well as thou; but I shall quickly rid myself of both."

He summoned Seneca and informed him that he would be sent with Acratus and Secundus Carinus to Italy, and to other provinces for money, which he was to draw from cities, villages, and famous sanctuaries. In a word, he was to get money wherever it could be obtained and by whatever means. Seneca, understanding that Caesar entrusted him with a work of plunder, sacrilege, and murder, refused flatly.

"Lord," he said, "I must go to the country and there await death, for my years are many and my nerves are shattered."

Seneca's Iberian nerves were stronger than those of Chilo, and were hardly shattered, perhaps, but in general his health was poor. He looked like a shadow, and his hair had lately grown entirely white.

Nero, looking at him, thought that he would not have to wait long for his death, and said: "If thou art really ill I do not wish to expose thee to the perils of the journey, but because of my love for thee, I wish to have thee

within call. Therefore, instead of going to the country, thou wilt stay in thine own house and not leave it."

He laughed, and added: "If I send Acratus and Carinus alone, 'twill be like sending wolves after sheep. Whom shall I place above them?"

"Put me above them," said Domitius Afer.

"No, I do not wish to bring upon Rome the wrath of Mercury, whom ye would shame with your thievery. I need a stoic like Seneca, or like my new friend, the philosopher, Chilo."

Here Nero looked around and asked:

"What has happened to Chilo?"

Chilo, who had come to his senses in the open air, and had returned to the amphitheatre to hear Caesar's song, approached and said:

"Here I am, O radiant offspring of the sun and moon, I was ill, but thy song cured me."

"I will send thee to Achaea," said Nero. "Doubtless thou knowest to a copper the amount in each temple."

"So be it, Zeus. The gods will grant thee tribute greater than they have ever given before."

"I would, but I do not wish to deprive thee of the sight of the games."

"Oh, Baal!" said Chilo.

The Augustales, overjoyed at Caesar's return to good humor, laughed and exclaimed:

"No, Lord, deprive not this brave Greek of the sight of the games."

"But preserve me, O Lord, from the sight of these strident geese of the Capitol, whose brains all put together would not fill a nutshell," retorted Chilo. "O First-born of Apollo, I am composing a Greek hymn in thy honor, and I would fain spend a few days in the temples of the muses to beg for inspiration."

"Nay!" exclaimed Nero, "thou desirest to escape the next games; that will not do."

"I swear, Lord, that I am composing a hymn."

"Thou canst write it at night. Beseech Diana for inspiration, she is Apollo's sister."

Chilo bowed his head. He gazed angrily around, when all again burst into laughter. Caesar addressed himself to Seneca, and Suilius Nerulinus:

"Just think, that of the Christians allotted for to-day, we have hardly disposed of half."

Hearing this, old Aquilus Regulus, who was a great critic of all things pertaining to the amphitheatre, bethought himself for a time, and said:

"Spectacles in which the performers appear unarmed and without skill endure almost as long as the others and are less interesting."

"I shall command that the rest of the Christians be armed," replied Nero.

But the superstitious Vestinius, suddenly rousing himself from a reverie, inquired in a mysterious voice:

"Have ye taken notice that, dying, these people see something? They gaze upward, and one would say that they perish without suffering. Surely, they see something."

He raised his eyes towards the opening of the amphitheatre, over which night had spread its star-strewn curtain. But others laughed and jested at thought of what the Christians might see at the point of death. Then Caesar gave a signal to the torch-bearers and left the circus. After him followed officials, vestals, senators, and Augustales.

It was a bright, warm night. In front of the circus were crowds of people who had remained to witness Caesar's departure. All were morose and silent. Occasional applause was heard, but it ceased immediately. Creaking carts, laden with the bloody remains of Christians, issued from the gates.

Petronius and Vinitius made their way homeward in silence. Only when approaching his villa did Petronius inquire:

"Hast thou thought over what I said to thee?"

"Yes," replied Vinitius.

"Dost thou understand that for me also this is an affair of the greatest moment. I must free her in spite

of Caesar and Tigellinus. 'Tis a battle wherein I mu conquer; a game which I must win even at the price of n life. This day has only strengthened my resolve."

"May Christ reward thee."

"Thou wilt see."

They had now reached the door of the villa. As the left the the litter a dark figure confronted them, askin

"Is this the noble Vinitius?"

"Yes," answered the Tribune, "what is thy wish?"

"I am Nazarius, the son of Miriam; I come from th prison, to bring thee news of Lygia."

Vinitius laid his hand on the young man's arm. H looked in his eyes by the gleam of the torch, powerle to speak a word. Nazarius guessed the question dyi upon his lips, and made answer.

"She is still alive. Ursus sent me to thee, master, tell thee that she prays in her fever, and repeats th name."

"Praise be to Christ, who may return her to me," e claimed Vinitius.

Then he led Nazarius to the library. Soon Petroni entered also to take part in the conversation.

"Her illness saved her from dishonor, because the e ecutioners were afraid," said the boy. "Ursus a Glaucus watch over her day and night."

"Are the guards the same?"

"Yes, master, and she is in their room. All the priso ers in the lower dungeon died of fever, or were suffocate by the foul air."

"Who art thou?" asked Petronius.

"The noble Vinitius knows me, I am the son of t widow with whom Lygia lived."

"Art thou a Christian also?"

The boy cast an inquiring glance at Vinitius. Seei that he was praying, he lifted his head and answered:

"Yea, master."

"How is it that thou art allowed free access to t prison?"

"I was engaged, master, to carry out the bodies of t

dead. I hired myself with a view of aiding my brethren and bringing them news from the city."

Petronius carefully scrutinized the handsome face of the boy, his blue eyes, and dark hair. Finally he asked:

"Where art thou from, my lad?"

"I am a Galilean, master."

"Wouldst thou like to see Lygia free?"

The boy raised his eyes.

"Even if I died the next moment."

Vinitius finished his prayer and said:

"Tell the guards to place her in a coffin as if dead. Thou wilt seek some helpers to bear her out in the night with thee. Near the "Putrid Pits" thou wilt find men waiting with a litter. Give them the coffin. Tell the guards I promise them as much gold as each can carry in his mantle."

As he spoke his face lost its usual pallor, and the soldier awoke in him, to whom hope brought courage.

Nazarius, overjoyed, raised his hands with the cry:

"May Christ restore her health, for she will be free."

"Dost thou believe that the guards will consent?" asked Petronius.

"Yes, master, if they knew that they would not meet with punishment and torture."

"True," said Vinitius, "the guards would even consent to her flight, all the more will they let us carry her out as a corpse."

"There is a man," said Nazarius, "who discovers by means of a red hot iron whether the bodies that we remove are really lifeless. But he will take a few sesterces not to touch the face of the dead. For one gold piece he would touch the coffin and not the body."

"Tell him that he will get a bagful of gold pieces," said Petronius. "But canst thou find trustworthy helpers?"

"I can find men who, for money, would sell their own wives and children."

"Where wilt thou find them?"

"In the prison itself or outside of it. Once the guards are bribed they will admit any one I wish."

"Then take me in the guise of a servant," said Vinitius.

But Petronius dissuaded him from this course. The pretorians might recognize him even in disguise, and this would bring failure upon the enterprise. "Go neither to the prison nor to the 'Putrid Pits,'" he said. "It is necessary that all, including Caesar and Tigellinus, should be convinced that she had really died, otherwise they would order immediate pursuit. We can allay suspicion only by staying in Rome, while she is being removed to the Alban Hills, or even farther, to Sicily. A week or two later thou wilt fall sick and summon Nero's physician, who will prescribe for thee the mountain air. There thou wilt join her, and afterwards—"

He mused a little, then, waving his hand, he continued:

"Afterwards, the times may change."

"May Christ have mercy on her," said Vinitius. "Thou speakest of Sicily, while she is ill and may die."

"We can keep her nearer at first. The air alone will cure her, if we could but get her out of prison. Is there no one in the mountains whom thou canst trust?"

"Yes," replied Vinitius, "not far from Corioli is a trustworthy man who used to carry me in his arms when I was a mere child, and who loves me still."

Petronius handed him some tablets. "Write him to come here to-morrow, I will send a messenger at once."

Then he summoned the chief to the hall, and gave him the necessary orders. A few moments later a mounted slave left for Corioli.

"I should like," said Vinitius, "that Ursus should accompany her on her journey. I should feel safer."

"Master," said Nazarius, "he is a man of superhuman strength; he will break the grating and follow her. There is one window in a high, perpendicular wall, where no guard is stationed. I will bring a rope to Ursus and he will do the rest."

"By Hercules!" exclaimed Petronius, "let him break from the prison as he pleases, but not at the same time with her, nor within two or three days after, for they would follow him and discover her hiding place. By

Hercules! do ye wish us all to perish with her? I forbid you to name Corioli to him, or I will wash my hands of the whole affair."

The others silently acknowledged the prudence of his remarks. Nazarius prepared to take leave of them, promising to come back the next morning at dawn.

He hoped to strike a bargain with the guards that night, but he wished first to see his mother, who, on account of the terrible times, was very anxious about him. After some reflection he resolved not to seek an assistant in the city, but to bribe one of his comrades among the corpse bearers. Before leaving, he took Vinitius aside and whispered:

"Master, I will mention our plan to no one, not even to my mother, but Peter the Apostle promised to come to our house from the amphitheatre, and to him I will tell everything."

"In this house thou canst speak openly," said Vinitius. "The Apostle Peter was in the amphitheatre with the people of Petronius. But stay, I myself will go with thee."

He ordered a slave to bring him a mantle, and they went out. Petronius drew a deep breath.

"I hoped that she would die of the fever," he thought, "since that would be less terrible for Vinitius. But now I am ready to offer a golden tripod to Aesculapius for her restoration to health. Ah, Bronzebeard, thou wishest to make a show of the agony of a lover! Thou, Augusta, wert jealous of the beauty of this girl, and now thou wouldst destroy her because thy Rufius has perished! Thou, Tigellinus, wouldst ruin her to spite me! We shall see. I tell ye that your eyes shall not behold her in the arena, because either she will die a natural death, or I shall rescue her from you. And I shall rescue her in such a way that ye will not know it, and then, whenever I look at ye afterwards I shall think: these are the fools whom Petronius outwitted."

And satisfied with himself he went into the dining room, where he sat down to supper with Eunice. A reader

read to them meanwhile the bucolics of Theocritus. The wind drove clouds from the Soracte. A sudden storm broke the stillness of the peaceful summer night. Ever and anon, thunder reverberated on the seven hills, while they, lying side by side, listened to the pastoral poet, who, in the melodious Doric dialect, celebrated the loves of shepherds. Soothed and lulled, they later prepared for sweet repose.

But before this Vinitius returned. Petronius went out to meet him and asked:

"Have ye determined on anything new? Has Nazarius gone to the prison?"

"Yes," replied the Tribune, arranging his wet hair. "Nazarius has gone to bribe the guards, and I have seen Peter, who commanded me to pray and to have faith."

"Good. If everything goes well we can carry her off to-morrow night."

"My steward from Corioli with his men must be here at dawn."

" 'Tis a short distance; now go to rest."

At sunrise Niger, the steward, arrived from Corioli. In accordance with the instructions of Vinitius, he brought with him mules, a litter, and four trusty men, selected from among British slaves. To avoid attracting attention he left them at the inn in the Suburra.

Vinitius, who had not slept the whole night, stepped out to meet him. The steward was greatly moved at sight of his young master. Kissing his hands and eyes, he exclaimed:

"My dear master, art thou ill, or has sorrow sucked the blood from thy cheeks? At first sight I could scarce recognize thee."

Vinitius led him to the interior colonnade, and there admitted him to the secret. Niger listened with close attention. On his healthy, swarthy face, a great emotion was evident, an emotion which he made no attempt to suppress.

"She is then a Christian?" he cried, with an inquiring

glance at the face of Vinitius. Evidently divining what that look meant, Vinitius replied:

"I also am a Christian."

Tears suffused the eyes of Niger. He was silent for a time. Then, lifting his hands, he said: "Thanks be to Christ for having removed the scales from the eyes that are dearest to me on earth." Then he embraced Vinitius, and, weeping from sheer happiness, kissed his forehead.

A moment later Petronius appeared, accompanied by Nazarius.

"Good news!" he cried from afar.

It was good news indeed. First, Glaucus, the physician, vouched for Lygia's life, though she was down with the same prison fever of which, in the Tullianum and other dungeons, hundreds were dying every day. As to the jailors and the man who tested the corpses with red-hot iron, there had not been the slightest difficulty. The assistant, Attys, had also been fixed.

"We made holes in the coffin so that the sick woman could breathe," said Nazarius; "the only danger is that she may groan or utter some word as we pass the pretorians. She is very weak and lies the whole day with closed eyes. Glaucus will give her a sleeping potion prepared from herbs which I myself will bring to him. The lid will not be nailed to the coffin. You will lift it easily and transfer the maiden to the litter. We will substitute in the coffin a long bag of sand which you will have ready."

Vinitius, as he listened, grew pale as a sheet, but withal he listened so attentively that he seemed to anticipate all Nazarius had to say.

"Will there be other bodies removed from the prison?" asked Petronius.

"Nearly twenty people died last night. Before evening, more will die," said the boy. "We will have to join the rest, but we will delay and drop to the rear. At the first turn my companion will begin to limp. In this way we shall fall considerably behind the others. Wait for

us at the small temple of Libitina. May God give us a dark night."

"God will do so," said Niger. "Yesterday evening that sky was clear again, but a sudden dampness has set in since morning. Every night now there will be wind and a rain."

"Are ye going without any lights?" asked Vinitius.

"The torches are carried only in front. In any case, wait in the vicinity of the Temple of Libitina, as soon as the dusk comes, though usually we remove the dead bodies only about midnight."

Silence fell upon all, and only the quick breathing of Vinitius was audible. Petronius turned to him:

"I said yesterday," he remarked, "that it would be the best plan if we both would stay at home. But I see now that I could not stay. Besides, if it were a question of flight, we should have to be more careful, but since she will be carried out as a corpse, it seems to me that not the slightest suspicion will be aroused."

"Yes, yes," said Vinitius, "I must be there. I myself will take her out of the coffin."

"Once she is under my roof at Corioli, I answer for her," said Niger.

This ended the conference. Niger wended his steps towards the inn to rejoin his men. Nazarius placed a heavy purse of gold under his tunic and went back to prison. For Vinitius began a day filled with uneasiness, excitement, fear, and hope.

"The undertaking should succeed, for it is well planned," said Petronius. "The matter could not have been arranged better. Thou must pretend to be in suffering, and don a dark toga. But do not miss the performances at the circus. Let the people see thee. Everything is so arranged that failure is impossible. But, a word, art thou entirely sure of thy steward?"

"He is a Christian," answered Vinitius.

Petronius looked at him in astonishment, then, shrugging his shoulders, said:

"By Pollux! how it spreads, and how it takes possession

of human souls. Under its powerful influence, people would abjure all the gods, Roman, Greek, and Egyptian. It is wonderful! By Pollux! if I believed that any of our gods had power, I would vow six white bulls to every one of them, and to Jupiter Capitolinus twelve. But forget not to make an offering to your Christ."

"I have given him my soul," answered Vinitius.

Then they parted.

Petronius returned to his bedroom. Vinitius, however, went to take a look at the prison from a distance. Thence he wended his way up the slope of the Vatican Hill to the cabin of the quarryman, where he had received baptism at the hands of the Apostle. It seemed to him that Christ would more readily listen to his petition in this hut than in any other place; consequently, when he had found it, he threw himself upon the floor, and so gave up his suffering soul to prayer that he forgot himself entirely and recalled not where he was or what he was doing.

Not until the afternoon was he aroused by the sound of trumpets which came from the direction of Nero's circus. He then left the hut and looked about him as if freshly aroused from sleep. It was hot and perfectly still; the silence was only broken from time to time by the sound of trumpets and by the chirping of crickets. The air was sultry, the sky above the city was still clear, but near the Sabine Hills, dark clouds were gathering about the horizon.

Vinitius returned home. At the entrance Petronius was waiting for him. "I have been on the Palatine," he said. "I showed myself there purposely and even sat down to a game of dice. Anicius gives a banquet tonight; I promised to go but not until after midnight, because I must sleep a little before that hour. And I shall go, and it would be well if thou couldst be present also."

"Hast thou any news from Niger, or Nazarius?" inquired Vinitius.

"No; we shall not see them before midnight. Hast thou noticed that a storm is approaching?"

"Yes, I have."

"To-morrow there is to be an exhibition of crucified Christians, but rain might prevent the performance."

Then coming closer to Vinitius and taking his arm, he said:

"But thou shalt not see her on the cross, but only in Corioli. By Castor! I wouldn't exchange the moment in which we free her for all the gems in Rome. The evening is close at hand."

And indeed the evening was approaching rapidly. Darkness began to envelop the city earlier than usual, on account of the clouds that now covered the entire horizon. With night came on a heavy rain, which, falling on the heated stones, turned into a steam and filled the streets of the city with a mist. Then followed a lull, and, after that, intermittent showers.

"Let us hurry," said Vinitius, at last. "Because of the storm they may carry the bodies away from the prison earlier than usual."

"It is time," said Petronius. Donning Gallic mantles, they passed through the garden gate out into the street. Petronius had armed himself with a short Roman knife called a sicca, which he always carried when out at night. The streets of the city were deserted on account of the storm. From time to time, lightning rent the clouds, illuminating with lurid flashings the newly-built walls of the houses lately erected, or in the process of erection, and the wet flagstones with which the streets were paved. By one of these lightning flashes they descried, at last, the mound whereon stood the little Temple of Libitina. At the foot of the mound was a group of mules and horses.

"Niger!" called Vinitius, in a low voice.

"Here, master," a voice answered from the fog.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes, master, we were here immediately after dark. But get yourself under cover, or you will be completely soaked. What a storm! I think that it is going to hail."

Niger's apprehension was well founded. Soon hail began to fall. The hail was, at first, fine, but the stones

became larger. The storm swept down heavily and the air grew chill. Having found shelter and protection from the wind and hail, they conversed in low tones.

"Even if some one should discover us," said Niger, "suspicion would not be aroused, for we look like people who are only waiting for the storm to pass over. But I fear lest the removal of the bodies should be postponed until to-morrow."

"This storm will not last long," said Petronius; "we must wait even until daybreak."

They waited, eagerly straining their ears to catch the sound of the procession. It ceased hailing, but immediately afterwards rain poured down. At times the wind rose and wafted from the "Putrid Pits" a dreadful odor of decaying bodies, interred carelessly near the surface.

All at once Niger exclaimed: "I see a faint light through the mist—one, two, three—those are torches." And, turning to his man, he said: "See that the mules do not snort."

"They are coming," said Petronius.

The lights were growing more and more distinct. Soon it was possible to discern the flames of the torches trembling in the wind.

Niger crossed himself and began to pray. Meanwhile the dismal procession came nearer, and at last drew up before the Temple of Libitina. Petronius, Vinitius, and Niger pressed up against the rampart, not knowing what was the meaning of this halt. But the men had stopped only for a moment to cover their faces and mouths with cloths in order to protect them from the stifling odor, which, at the edge of the Putrid Pits, was simply unbearable. Then they lifted the biers and went on.

Only one coffin was halted just before the temple. Vinitius hurried towards it, followed by Petronius and Niger, and two Briton slaves with a litter. But ere they had reached it, the voice of Nazarius was heard saying, in tones of anguish: "Master, they have taken her from Ursus to the Esquiline prison. We are carrying

another body, for she was removed before midnight."

After his return home, Petronius was plunged in gloom, and did not even attempt to console Vinitius. He knew that it would be impossible to rescue Lygia from the Esquiline prison. He divined that she had probably been transferred from the Tullianum lest she should die of fever and thus escape the destined amphitheatre. On this very account she would be guarded all the more carefully. Petronius was deeply grieved for her, and for Vinitius. Moreover, he was vexed, because, for the first time in his life, he had failed and had been beaten in a contest.

"Fortune appears to have deserted me," he said to himself. "But the gods are mistaken if they think I will consent to such a life as his, for example." Here he looked at Vinitius, who in turn gazed at him with wide-staring eyes.

"What ails thee? Hast thou a fever?" said Petronius.

The other replied, with a peculiar broken and halting voice, like that of a sick child:

"I still believe that He will restore her to me."

Above the city the last echoes of the storm had died away.

CHAPTER XV

A rain lasting for three days; a rare phenomenon in Rome during the summer season: and hail falling, against the natural order of things not only during the day and evening, but even at night, interrupted the spectacles. People were growing alarmed. The failure of the vintage was predicted. When, at noon, on a certain day, a thunderbolt melted the bronze statue of Ceres on the Capitol, sacrifices were ordered in the temple of Jupiter Salvator. The priest of Ceres gave it out that the wrath of the gods had been brought upon the city because the Christians had not been sufficiently punished. People

then began to demand that, irrespective of weather, the spectacles should take place. Joy arose in Rome that the games would begin again after an interval of three days.

Meantime fair weather returned. The amphitheatre, from dawn till night, was filled with thousands of people. Caesar arrived early with the vestals and the court. The spectacle was to commence with a battle among the Christians, arrayed for the purpose as gladiators and supplied with all the various weapons used by gladiators for offensive and defensive warfare. But here came disappointment. The Christians threw the nets, darts, javelins and swords down upon the arena, and, instead of fighting, they embraced and encouraged one another to persist in the face of torture and death. The hearts of the populace were stirred with anger and indignation. Some accused the Christians of cowardice and baseness of mind; others asserted that they refused to fight because of their hatred of the people, and in order to deprive them of the enjoyment of a display of courage. Finally, at Caesar's command, real gladiators were summoned, who made short work of the kneeling, and defenseless Christians.

When the bodies were removed, the spectacle was changed to a series of mythological representations, conceived by Caesar himself. Hercules appeared, blazing in fire on Mount Oeta. Vinitius had trembled at the thought that perhaps Ursus had been selected for the part of Hercules. But evidently the turn of the faithful servant of Lygia had not yet come, since there perished at the stake some other Christian quite unknown to Vinitius. In the next picture, however, Chilo, whom Caesar would not excuse from attendance, saw people whom he knew well. The death of Daedalus and that of Icarus were represented. The rôle of Daedalus was taken by Euritius, the old man who had first explained to Chilo the symbol of the fish. The rôle of Icarus was sustained by his son, Quartus. Both were hoisted in the air by means of machinery, and then hurled from an

immense height down upon the arena. Young Quartus fell so near the imperial box that his blood spattered not only the external ornaments, but even the purple-covered seat. Chilo did not witness the fall, because he had closed his eyes. He heard only the dull thud of the body. When, after a time, he caught sight of blood just near him, he came near fainting for the second time. The pictures changed rapidly. The hearts of the rabble were delighted by the shameful torments of virgins, dishonored before death by gladiators in the guise of wild beasts. Priestesses of Cybele and Ceres were to be seen, and the Danaides and Circe and Pasiphae; finally, little girls were torn asunder by wild horses. The people applauded every new device of Nero, who, proud of his inventions and immensely pleased by the applause, did not take the emerald from his eye for an instant while gazing upon white bodies torn with iron, and the convulsive contortions of the victims.

Pictures representing the history of the city were also given. After the maidens appeared Musius Scaevola, whose hand, fastened to a tripod over a fire, filled the amphitheatre with the odor of burning flesh. Like the real Scaevola, he stood there silent, without emitting a groan, his eyes raised upward and the murmurs of a prayer on his blackened lips. When death had ended his torments and his body had been removed, the usual noonday interlude took place. Caesar, with the vestals and the Augustales, left the amphitheatre and betook himself to a scarlet tent, erected purposely for the occasion, in which a gorgeous banquet had been prepared for himself and his guests. The onlookers, for the greater part, followed his example, and, pouring out of the building, scattered into picturesque groups, and disposed themselves about the tent to enjoy the food which through Caesar's favor was lavishly bestowed upon them. The more curious among the spectators stepped down into the arena itself. Touching with their fingers the sand clotted with blood, they discussed as connoisseurs the performances that had taken place and those that were to follow.

Soon even these left the arena, lest they should miss the banquet; only a few remained, and these not through curiosity, but out of compassion for the coming victims. These hid themselves in compartments, or beneath the lower seats. Meantime the arena was leveled and pits were dug in rows throughout the whole circuit from one side to the other, so that the last row was but a few steps from the imperial box.

From outside the circus came the voices of people, shouts and applause, while within everything was being prepared with feverish haste for new tortures. All at once the dungeons were opened, and through all the passages leading to the arena groups of Christians were driven, naked, with crosses on their shoulders. The great amphitheatre was filled with them. Old men, bent under the weight of wooden crosses, ran forward; alongside of them were vigorous men in the prime of life, women with dishevelled hair, under cover of which they strove to conceal their nakedness; small boys and little children. Most of the crosses as well as the victims were decorated with flowers. The servants of the amphitheatre scourged the unfortunates with whips, and forced them to place their crosses beside the pits prepared for them, and to stand themselves in rows beside the crosses. In this way were to perish all those who had not on the first day of the games been driven out as food for dogs and wild beasts. Black slaves seized the victims, and, laying them upon the wood, nailed their hands rapidly to the arms of the crosses, so that after the intermission, the people should find the crosses already erect. The noise of hammers reverberated through the whole amphitheatre, and, echoing among the higher tiers of seats, reached the place surrounding the amphitheatre, and even the tent where Caesar was entertaining his retinue and the vestals. There he quaffed goblet after goblet of wine, bantered Chilo, and whispered strange words into the ears of the priestesses of Vesta. But in the arena the work was being pushed, nails were being hammered into the hands and feet of the Christians; and spades

moved quickly, filling with earth the pits in which the crosses had been planted.

Among the victims awaiting their turn was Crispus. The lions had not had time to tear him to pieces. Therefore he had been sentenced to die on the cross. Always ready for death, he rejoiced that his hour was near. To-day he seemed like another man, for his withered body had been entirely stripped. Only an ivy wreath encircled his hips. On his head was a garland of roses. But in his eyes there shone ever that same unsubdued energy; that same stern and fanatical face looked from beneath the garland of roses. Nor had his heart changed. As before, in the dungeon, he had threatened with the wrath of God his brethren sewed up in hides, so now, instead of consoling them, he thundered forth:

"Thank the Saviour that He allows you to die the same death as Himself. Perhaps some of your sins will be forgiven on this account. But tremble, for justice must be satisfied, and there cannot be one reward for the wicked and the good!"

He spoke to the accompaniment of hammers which drove the nails into the feet and hands of the victims. The crosses multiplied in the arena. He, however, turning to those who stood by their crosses, spoke as follows:

"I see heaven open before me, but I see also the open abyss. I do not know how I shall stand myself before the Lord, though I have believed, and hated evil. I fear not death, but the resurrection; not torture, but the judgment, for the day of wrath is approaching."

At that moment, from among the nearest tiers of seats, came a voice, calm and solemn:

"Not the day of wrath, but of mercy, the day of salvation and joy, because I tell you that Christ will receive you, will comfort you, and will seat you on His right hand. Be of good faith, for heaven is opening before you."

At these words all eyes were turned towards the benches; even those already fastened to the crosses raised

their pale, anguished faces, and looked in the direction of the speaker.

Then the man who had spoken came to the partition surrounding the arena, and blessed the victims with the sign of the cross.

Crispus stretched out his hand, as if to expostulate, but when he saw the speaker's face, he dropped his hand, his knees bent under him, and his lips whispered: "Paul, the Apostle!"

To the amazement of the servants of the circus, all those who were not yet nailed to the crosses fell upon their knees. Paul of Tarsus turned towards Crispus, and said:

"Crispus! threaten them not, for this day they will be with thee in paradise. Thou deemest that they may be damned, but who will condemn them? Will God condemn them, He who gave His Son for them? Will Christ, who died to save them, just as they die now for His sake? How could He who loves them condemn them? Who will accuse the elect of God? Who will say that this blood is accursed?"

"Master, I have hated evil!" cried out the old priest.

"Christ laid more stress upon His command to love our fellow-men than to hate evil, for he taught love, not hatred."

"I have sinned in the hour of my death!" cried Crispus, striking his breast.

The manager in charge of the benches now came up to the Apostle, and said to him:

"Who art thou that dares to speak to the condemned?"

"A Roman citizen," Paul replied, calmly. Then turning to Crispus, he said:

"Have confidence, for to-day is a day of grace; die in peace, oh, servant of God!"

Two negroes approached Crispus at this moment to place him on the cross, but he looked around once more, and exclaimed: "My brethren, pray for me!"

His face had lost its usual severity; his features had assumed an aspect of sweetness and mildness. He

stretched his arms himself upon the cross, so as to facilitate the work, and, looking straight upwards to the sky, he began to pray fervently. He seemed insensible to pain; for when the nails entered his palms not the least tremor shook his body, nor did the slightest contortion of pain appear upon his face. He prayed while his legs were being fastened, and continued to pray when they raised the cross and the earth was being beaten down about it. Only when the rabble began to fill the amphitheatre with shouts and laughter did the brows of the old man contract, as if in anger that a pagan people were disturbing the peace of a sweet death.

By this time all the crosses had been raised, so that the arena bore the appearance of a forest with people hanging on the trees. On the arms of the crosses and on the heads of the martyrs the sunshine fell, but on the arena was a thick shadow, like a black, tangled grating, through which gleamed the yellow sand. The whole pleasure of this spectacle consisted in the delight taken by the audience in watching a lingering death. Never before had there been such a large collection of crosses. The arena was so packed that the servants moved about among them with difficulty. On the crosses closest to the seats hung women, but Crispus, as a leader, was placed close to the Imperial box, on an enormous cross, wreathed at the bottom with flowers. None of the victims had as yet expired, but a few who had been first crucified had fainted. No one groaned or cried for mercy. Some were hanging with their heads leaning upon the shoulder, or dropped upon the breast, as if overcome by sleep; some seemed in meditation; some, looking towards heaven, moved their lips silently. There was something ominous in that fearful array of crosses, in those crucified beings, and in the silence of the victims. The people, sated with the banquet and in a pleasant state of mind, had returned to the circus with joyful shouts; but now they grew silent, not knowing upon which body to fix their eyes, nor what to think of the performance. The nudeness of the women seemed to excite no interest.

They even refrained from betting as to who should die first, a thing usually done when smaller numbers of convicted appeared in the arena. Even Caesar appeared to get little enjoyment from the spectacle, for he turned his head in indolent and drowsy fashion to arrange his necklace.

Suddenly Crispus, who was hanging opposite, and who for a time had closed his eyes, as a man fainting or dying, opened them and gazed at Caesar. His face assumed such a terrible expression, and his eyes blazed with such fire, that the Augustales began to whisper among themselves, pointing him out with their fingers, and at length Caesar himself directed his attention towards him and slowly placed the emerald to his eye.

Perfect stillness reigned. The eyes of the spectators were fixed upon Crispus, who attempted to move his right arm, as if to tear it from the cross. After a while his breast rose, his ribs stood out, and he cried: "Matricide, woe to thee!"

The Augustales, hearing this mortal insult flung publicly into the very face of the lord of the world, scarce dared to breathe. Chilo came near fainting. Caesar shuddered and let his emerald fall. The people, too, held their breath. Then the voice of Crispus reverberated again with greater power through the entire amphitheatre:

"Woe to thee, murderer of wife and brother! Woe to thee, Antichrist! The abyss is opening under thee, death is stretching its arms to embrace thee, the grave is yawning for thee! Woe to thee, living corpse, in terror thou shalt die, and thou shalt be damned forever!"

Unable to wrench away his hand, nailed to the cross, he strained himself in a frightful fashion. He resembled a death's head, inexorable as destiny; he shook his white beard at Nero's box, and with every motion of his head the roses fell from the garland which decorated it.

"Woe to thee, murderer! Thy doom is sealed and thy hour has come!"

Thus speaking, he made a supreme effort. For a moment it seemed that he would wrench his hand from

the cross and extend it in menace over Caesar; but suddenly, his emaciated arms extended still more, his body slipped downward, his head drooped upon his breast, and he gave up the ghost.

Among the forest of crosses weaker victims began also to drop into that sleep that knows no waking.

CHAPTER XVI

"Lord," said Chilo, "the sea is like oil, and the waves seem to sleep; let us go to Achaea. There the glory of Apollo, there crowns and triumph await thee, there the people adore thee, and the gods will receive thee as one of their own, whereas here, O lord—"

And he stopped, for his lower lip trembled so that his words changed into meaningless sounds.

"When the games are over we shall go," replied Nero. "I know that already some style the Christians inoffensive. Should I depart, all would say this same thing. What fearest thou? Thou coward!"

He knitted his brows, but looked with a questioning glance at Chilo, as if awaiting an explanation, for he only feigned to be unmoved. During that last exhibition he himself had been frightened by the words of Crispus, and when he had returned home he could not sleep from anger and shame, and from fear also. Then Vestinius, who had listened in silence to the conversation, looked cautiously about, and said in a solemn voice:

"Hearken, O lord, to the words of that old man! There is something strange about these Christians; their God grants them an easy death, but he may have vengeance in store for their enemies."

Nero retorted quickly: "I did not arrange the games. Tigellinus was the manager."

"Yes, I was the manager," said Tigellinus, who caught Caesar's words. "Yes, I am the man, and I defy all the Christian gods! Vestinius, my lord, is a bladder full of

superstition, and this bold Greek is likely to die of terror at the sight of a hen defending her chickens."

"Very well," said Nero; "but from this day give orders that the tongues shall be torn from the Christians, that thus their mouths may be silenced."

"Fire will silence them, O divinity!"

"Woe is me!" groaned Chilo.

But Caesar, whose courage was restored by the arrogant confidence of Tigellinus, burst out laughing, and exclaimed, pointing a scornful finger at the old Greek: "Behold this offspring of Achilles!"

Chilo indeed looked dreadfully disturbed. What hair remained on his head had become white; on his face was an expression of great fear and distress. At times he appeared confused and as if only half conscious. Often he paid no heed to questions; sometimes again he became so angry and insolent that the Augustales preferred to let him alone. Such a moment came to him then.

"Do what you please, but I will not go any more to the games," he cried in desperation.

Nero regarded him attentively for awhile, and turning to Tigellinus, said:

"See to it that this Stoic is near to me in the gardens. I want to see how the torches will impress him."

Chilo was frightened at the threat which trembled in Caesar's voice.

"Lord," he said, "I shall see nothing, for I cannot see in the night."

But Caesar, with a meaning smile, replied: "The night will be as bright as day."

Then he turned towards the Augustales, to whom he talked about some races with which he intended to wind up the games.

Petronius approached Chilo, and touching his arm, said:

"Did I not tell thee that thou wouldst not hold out?"

The other, however, answered: "I am athirst." He stretched his trembling hand for a goblet of wine, but could not raise it to his lips. Seeing this, Vestinius took

the goblet from him, and approaching him closely, inquired, with a curious and frightened face:

"Are the Furies pursuing thee? Tell me."

The old man stared at him for a time, with his mouth wide open, as if he did not comprehend the question. Vestinius then repeated:

"Are the Furies pursuing thee?"

"No," replied Chilo, "but the night is before me."

"How is that? The night? The gods have mercy on thee! what dost thou mean?"

"A night terrible and dark, in which something moves and comes towards me. Something I know not what, and I am very much afraid."

"I have always believed in witches. Dost thou dream?"

"No, because I cannot sleep. I did not think that they would be punished thus."

"Art thou sorry for them?"

"Why do you shed so much blood? Didst thou not hear what the man said from the cross? Woe to us!"

"I heard," answered Vestinius, "but they are incendiaries."

"That is a lie."

"And they are foes of mankind."

"That is a lie."

"And the poisoners of water."

"That is a lie."

"And the murderers of children."

"That is a lie."

"How?" inquired Vestinius, with amazement. "Hast thou not said so thyself? And didst thou not deliver them into the hands of Tigellinus?"

"Therefore night has encompassed me, and death is approaching me. Sometimes I think that I am dead already, and you also."

"No, it is they who die, and we are alive. But tell me what do they see as they expire?"

"Christ."

"Their God? Is He a powerful God?"

But Chilo answered with a question:

"What kind of torches are to be lighted in the gardens? Didst thou hear what Caesar said?"

"I heard, and I know. They are called sarmentitii and semaxii. They are made by clothing men in the tunics of torture, steeped in pitch. After that the victims are bound to pillars and set on fire. May their God not visit some dreadful calamity upon the city. Semaxii. That is a horrible punishment."

"I prefer it, because there will be no bloodshed," replied Chilo. "Hold the goblet to my lips. I am thirsty, but I spill the wine, my hand trembles so from age."

Meantime others also were talking about the Christians. Old Domitius Afer ridiculed them.

"There are such numbers of them," he said, "that they might raise a civil war, and remember it was feared that they would defend themselves; but they die like sheep."

"Let them try any other way," said Tigellinus.

Upon this Petronius exclaimed: "You are mistaken, they are arming themselves."

"With what?"

"With patience."

"That is a new weapon."

"Yes. But can you say that they die like common criminals? No! They die as if those were criminals who put them to death. That is, we and the whole Roman people."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Tigellinus.

"What an Abderite!" * replied Petronius.

And others, struck with the appropriateness of his remark, looked at each other and repeated:

"To be sure, there is something strange and peculiar in their manner of dying."

"I tell you that they behold their deity!" cried Vestinius.

Thereupon several Augustales turned to Chilo.

* NOTE.—A native of Abdera, which had the reputation of being peopled by dunces.

"Ho, old man! thou knowest them well; tell us what they see."

The Greek spat wine upon his tunic, and answered: "The resurrection."

And he trembled so that the guests who sat nearest to him burst into loud laughter.

CHAPTER XVII

For the last few nights Vinitius had been away from home. Petronius surmised that he had made some new plan for liberating Lygia from the Esquiline prison; but he did not like to question him lest he might bring misfortune upon his efforts. The skeptical exquisite had become, in a certain sense, superstitious. From the time that he had failed to free the girl from the Mamertine prison, he ceased to trust in his own star.

Moreover, he did not look for good results from the efforts of Vinitius. The Esquiline prison, which had been arranged hurriedly from the cellars of houses torn down to check the conflagration, was not, it is true, so terrible as the old Tullianum near the Capitol, but it was much better guarded. Petronius understood very well that Lygia had been transferred there so that she might not die, and thus escape the amphitheatre. It was clear to him, therefore, that they were now guarding her all the more watchfully.

"Evidently," he said to himself, "Caesar and Tigellinus are reserving her for some special spectacle, more horrible than the others, and Vinitius is more likely himself to perish than to rescue his loved one."

Vinitius, also, had lost hope that he would be able to rescue Lygia. Christ alone could save her. The young Tribune longed only to visit her in prison.

It was in his mind that Nazarius had succeeded in entering the Mamertine prison, disguised as one of the

servants, employed in removing the dead. He resolved to try this method also.

The jailer of the Putrid Pits, whom he bribed with an immense sum of money, at length placed him on the list of those servants whom he sent every night to bear the corpses from the prison. The danger of discovery was slight. The night, the dress of a slave, and the meager light in the prison were good allies. Who, besides, would surmise that a patrician, the grandson of one consul and the son of another, could be found among hirelings, exposed to the foul air of prisons and of the Putrid Pits, and that he would be engaged in work to which men were forced only by slavery or by the direst penury.

When the longed-for evening came, he girded his loins gladly, bound a cloth soaked in turpentine about his head, and, with a throbbing heart, accompanied a crowd of others to the Esquiline.

The pretorian guards made no trouble, because all possessed the proper credentials, which the centurion scrutinized by the light of a lantern. After a time, the great iron gates swung open, and they entered.

Vinitius saw before him a vast vaulted cellar, through which they passed to a number of others. Dim lamps lighted the interiors, which were crowded with prisoners. Some of these were lying on the floor sunk in sleep, or perhaps dead. Others crowded around large vessels of water which stood in the middle of the vaults, and from which they drank as do people suffering from fever; still others sat upon the floor, their elbows on their knees and their heads upon the palms of their hands. Here and there children nestled close to their mothers, fast asleep. All about were heard groans, the loud breathing of the sick, sobs, whispered prayers, hymns in an undertone, and the curses of the jailers. The air of the dungeon was heavy with the odor of men and corpses. In its gloomy deeps crouched dark figures. Nearer to the flickering lights might be discerned pale faces, terrified, emaciated, cadaverous, their eyes dimmed or shining with fever, their lips blue, drops of perspiration oozing from

their foreheads and their clammy hair. In far corners the sick moaned aloud. Some cried for water, others prayed for death. Yet this prison was not so horrible as the old Tullianum. At the ghastly sight, the legs of Vinitius trembled beneath him and breath almost failed him. The thought that Lygia was in the midst of this horror and misery raised the hair on his head. He stifled a cry of despair. The amphitheatre, the tusks of wild beasts, the cross, anything was better than this horrible dungeon, full of foul air, from every corner of which rose plaintive human cries: "Lead us to death!"

Vinitius dug his nails into his palms. He felt that he was growing weak, that his senses were leaving him. All that he had suffered heretofore, all his love and pain, changed into one intense yearning for death.

Just then the guardian of the Putrid Pits asked: "How many corpses have ye to-day?"

"About a dozen," replied the jailer, "but by the morning there will be more, because some are in their last agonies beside the walls."

He complained about the women, that they concealed their dead children, so as to keep them as long as possible and not to yield them to the Pits. The corpses, he further complained, were only discovered by their odor, and this rendered the foul air still more baleful and poisonous. "I should rather be a slave in some rural prison," he said, "than to watch these dogs rotting here alive."

The overseer of the Pits consoled him, saying that his own work was no easier.

By this time Vinitius had regained his faculties, and began to look around the prison; but he sought for Lygia in vain, and feared that he might never see her again alive. Several cellars were connected by newly-made passages; the corpse-bearers entered only those from which dead bodies were to be removed. Vinitius feared lest all his plans might prove useless. Fortunately his patron aided him.

"The bodies must be removed immediately," said he, "for infection spreads mostly on account of the corpses. If ye are not careful, ye will yourselves die with the prisoners."

"Only ten men are allotted for all the cellars," said the watchman, "and we must sleep."

"I will leave four of my own men who will visit the cellars during the night and report all cases of death."

"We will drink to thy health to-morrow if thou do that. Every corpse must be tested, because we have an order to pierce the neck of each corpse and then take it at once to the Pits."

"Very well then, but we must have our drink," said the overseer.

He selected four men and among them Vinitius; the rest he took to load the corpses upon the biers.

Vinitius drew a long breath. He was now certain that he should be able to find Lygia. He started by examining the first dungeon and looked into all the dark nooks, and examined the figures who slept beside the walls covered with rags; he went among the most grievously ill, who were placed in a special corner; but he could not find Lygia. His search through the second and third dungeons was also without result.

Meantime the night had advanced; all the bodies had been carried out. The jailers went to sleep in the corridors adjoining the dungeons; the children, weary of crying, were silent; in the vaults were heard only the breathing of troubled breasts, and ever and anon, the whisper of prayers.

Vinitius carried his torch into the fourth dungeon, which was much smaller, and lifting the light, he began to search through it. Suddenly he trembled, for he seemed to see the gigantic figure of Ursus close by a grating in the wall. Then putting out his light he approached and said:

"Is it thee, Ursus?"

The giant turned his head. "Who art thou?"

"Dost thou not recognize me?" asked the young man.

"Thou didst put out the light. How can I recognize thee?"

Vinitius at that moment descried Lygia lying on a cloak near the wall, so without another word, he knelt beside her. Ursus then recognized him and said: " 'Glory be to Christ, but do not awaken her, master."

Vinitius, kneeling, gazed at Lygia through his tears. Despite the darkness, he could distinguish her face, pale as alabaster, and her emaciated arms. He was seized by an agony of love which penetrated his soul to the deepest depths and which at the same time was so full of compassion, reverence and homage, that falling upon his face, he pressed to his lips the hem of the cloak upon which rested the head so dear to him.

Ursus regarded him for a long time in silence; finally he tugged at his tunic:

"Master," he asked, "how didst thou enter here, and hast thou come to save her?"

Vinitius rose, and for a time struggled with his emotions.

"Show me a way," he said.

"I thought thou wouldst find it, master."

"I know of one way only."

Here he turned his eyes towards the grated opening in the wall and then, as if in answer to himself, he said:

"Yes, but there are soldiers outside."

"A hundred pretorians," answered Vinitius.

"We cannot get by, then?"

"No."

The Lygian rubbed his forehead and asked again: "How didst thou enter here?"

"I have credentials from the overseer of the Putrid Pits."

Suddenly he stopped as if a new thought had struck him: "By the passion of the Saviour," he said quickly, "I will remain here; let her take my pass, let her cover her head with a cloth and her shoulders with the mantle and pass out. Among the slaves engaged about here,

there are a few striplings; the pretorians will not recognize her, and if she goes to the house of Petronius, he will guard her."

The Lygian dropped his head upon his breast and said: "She would not consent to this, for she loves thee; besides she is ill and cannot stand alone. If thou, oh, master, and the noble Petronius, cannot save her from prison, who can?"

"Christ only."

Then both were silent. In his simple mind the Lygian thought: "Christ, undoubtedly, could save all of us, but since he does not do so, the hour of agony and death has evidently come." For himself he bowed to the decree, but he grieved for the dear child who had grown up in his arms, and whom he loved above all things. Vinitius knelt again beside Lygia. The pale beams of the moon stole through the grating in the wall and gave better light than the solitary lamp which flickered over the entrance. Lygia opened her eyes and laying her hot hand on that of Vinitius, said: "I see thee. I knew that thou wouldst come."

He took her hands, lifted them to his heart, then raising her somewhat, he pressed her to his breast.

"I have come, my dear one," he said, "may Christ watch over and save thee, O my beloved!"

He could speak no more because of the pain which his love caused him, but he did not wish to betray his anguish.

"I am sick, Marcus," said Lygia, "and I must die, either here or in the arena. I have prayed to see thee before I die, and thou hast come. Christ has heard my prayer."

Unable to utter a word, Vinitius pressed her to his breast, and she continued: "I saw thee from the window in the Tullianum, and I knew that thou didst desire to come. And now the Saviour has granted me a moment of consciousness so that we may say farewell. I am going to Him, very soon, but I love thee, Marcus, and I shall love thee forever."

By an effort Vinitius controlled himself. Stifling his pain, he spoke in a voice which he strove to make calm: "No, dear one, thou shalt not die. The Apostle commanded me to have faith, and promised to pray for thee. He knew Christ, Christ loved him and will not refuse his request. If it was ordained that thou shouldst die now, Peter would not have bid me to be confident, but he said 'have confidence.' No, Lygia, Christ will have mercy. He does not desire thy death. He will not permit it. I swear by the name of the Saviour, that Peter prays for you."

Silence followed; the solitary lamp over the doorway went out, but the moonlight streamed through the opening. In a corner of the cellar a child cried, and was silent again. From the outside came the voices of pretorians, who after their watches, played at "Scriptæ Duodecem," under the wall.

"Oh, Marcus." replied Lygia, "Christ himself cried to the Father, 'Let this bitter chalice pass from me,' but still he drank it. Christ himself died on the cross and now thousands perish for his sake. Why should he spare me alone? Who am I, Marcus? I heard Peter say, that he also would die on the cross, and what am I compared to him? When the pretorians came for us I was afraid of death and torture, but I fear no more. Look how terrible is this prison, but I am going to heaven. Think of it. Here is Caesar, but there is the Saviour, good and merciful; with him there is no death. Thou lovest me; think then how happy I shall be; O Marcus, my loved one, think that thou wilt follow me."

Here she paused for breath and then raised his hand to her lips:

"Marcus?"

"What, dear one?"

"Do not weep for me, and remember, thou wilt follow me. I have lived only a short while, but God gave me thy soul. I desire to tell Christ, that though I died, and that though thou didst look upon my death, and though thou wert left in sorrow, yet thou didst not blaspheme

against His will and didst love Him always. Wilt thou love Him and suffer my death patiently? For then He will unite us. I love thee and I wish to be with thee forever."

Here again she paused for breath, and in a scarcely audible voice she continued: "Promise me this, Marcus?"

Vinitius embraced her with trembling arms and replied: "By that sacred head, I promise."

Her face grew radiant in the pale light of the moon, and raising once more his hand to her lips, she murmured: "I am thy wife."

Beyond the wall, the pretorians, in the midst of their game roused a loud dispute; but these two forgot the prison, the guards, the world, and feeling within themselves the souls of angels, they lifted their hearts in prayer.

CHAPTER XVIII

For three days, or rather three nights, nothing disturbed the peace of the lovers. After the usual prison work, which consisted of separating the dead from the living, and those who were very ill from those who were moderately so, had been completed, and after the tired jailers had gone to sleep in the corridors, Vinitius would enter the dungeon in which Lygia was, and remain there until the dawn. She put her head on his breast, and in low voices they conversed of love and death. By degrees their thoughts and conversation, even their desires and hopes turned more and more from life, and they lost a realizing sense of it. Both were like people, who, having left the land behind them, in a ship, see the shore no more, and go out gradually into the infinite. Both were transformed by degrees into sad spirits enamored of each other and of Christ, and ready to fly away.

Only at times, did pain, like a storm, enter the breast of Vinitius. At times, like lightning, there flashed through

him a hope, born of love and faith in the mercy of the crucified God; but more and more he abstracted his mind from the world and turned his thoughts to death. In the morning, when he emerged from the prison, he regarded the world, the city, his friends, and all the affairs of life as though in a dream. Everything seemed to him strange, distant, empty, and vain. Even torture ceased to terrify him, since it might be passed through with thoughts and eyes fixed on other things. Both he and Lygia felt as if already they were entering eternity; they talked about how they would love each other and live together beyond the grave. If their thoughts turned sometimes toward worldly things, it was as the thoughts of people who, setting out for a long journey, discuss the preparations for the road. Moreover, they were surrounded by a silence such as might surround two columns standing forgotten in the solitude of a desert. They desired only that Christ should not separate them; as every moment strengthened the faith of both, they loved Him as a link which was to unite them in infinite bliss and repose. Though still on earth, the dust of earth fell from them; their souls became pure as tears. With death staring them in the face, environed by misery and suffering, yea, in that very prison, heaven had begun, for she had taken him by the hand and had led him, as one already saved and sainted, towards the source of eternal life.

Petronius was astonished to see on the face of Vinitius an expression of calmness and marvellous serenity, which he had never noticed before. At times, he imagined that Vinitius must have evolved some plan of rescue, and was piqued that he had not confided in him. Finally, he could stand it no longer, and said: "Thou hast the look of another man. Keep no secrets from me, for I desire and am able to help thee. What is thy plan?"

"I have a plan," answered Vinitius, "but thou canst not help me. After her death I will confess I am a Christian, and then I shall follow her."

"Hast thou then no hope?"

"Oh, yes, Christ will give her back to me, and afterwards we shall never be parted!"

Petronius paced up and down the room with an air of disapproval and impatience.

"Thou dost not need Christ for this," he said at last, "for our own Thanatos can render the same service."

Vinitius smiled sadly, and said: "No, my friend; thou dost not understand."

"I do not want to, and I cannot. This is not a time for argument, but dost thou remember thine own words after we failed to rescue her from the Tullianum? I lost all hope, but after we returned home, thou didst say, 'Still I believe that Christ will restore her to me.' Let Him restore her now. Should I cast a costly goblet into the sea, no one of our gods could restore it to me. If thy God is also powerless, why should I honor Him above the ancient ones?"

"But he will restore her to me," said Vinitius.

Petronius made a gesture of impatience. "Dost thou know," he asked, "that to-morrow Caesar's garden will be illuminated with Christians?"

"To-morrow!" repeated Vinitius; and in face of a near and dread reality his heart was shaken with agony and apprehension. He thought that this night might be the last which he could pass with Lygia. So, taking leave of Petronius, he hastened to get his credentials from the overseer of the Pits. But a disappointment was in store for him, for the overseer refused to give them to him.

"Pardon me, master," he said; "I have done what I could for thee, but I cannot risk my life. To-night they will take the Christians to the gardens of Caesar. The prison will be filled with soldiers and officials. Should they recognize thee, I and my family would perish."

Vinitius saw that it would be vain to insist. He hoped, however, that the soldiers, who had seen him before, would admit him without the credentials; so, when night approached, he disguised himself in the tunic that he had formerly worn, and with covered head wended his way toward the prison, only to find that on this day

the credentials were scrutinized with particular care. What was more, the Centurion Scevinus, a strict disciplinarian, devoted entirely to Caesar, recognized Vinitius. But evidently in his heart, beneath his steel armor, there yet beat some compassion for misfortune. Instead of striking his spear against his shield as an alarm, he pulled Vinitius aside and said:

"Master, go home. I recognize thee, but, not wishing thy death, I shall keep silent. I cannot admit thee. Go thou hence, and may the gods console thee."

"Thou canst not admit me," said Vinitius, "but suffer me to remain here and watch those who are led forth."

"I have no orders against that," said Scevinus.

Vinitius stood before the gate and waited till the prisoners should appear. At last, about midnight, the gates were thrown open and there appeared lines of prisoners, men, women and children, surrounded by armed detachments of pretorians. The night was very bright, for the moon was full, and it was easy to identify not only the forms, but the faces of the unfortunates. They marched in pairs, in a long, gloomy procession, amidst silence broken only by the din of weapons. So many were led forth that it seemed as if all the dungeons must be emptied.

Towards the end of the procession Vinitius caught a glimpse of Glaucus, the physician; but he did not see either Lygia or Ursus among the condemned.

CHAPTER XIX

Evening had not yet come, when crowds of people began to gather in the gardens of Caesar. They were decked in holiday attire and crowned with wreaths, and joyously broke out into songs. Some were intoxicated. All had come to see the new and magnificent spectacle. Cries of "Semaxii! Sarmentitii!" echoed in the Via Tect on the bridge of Emilius, and from the other side of the

Tiber, on the Triumphal Way, around the Circus of Nero, and afar off on the Vatican Hill. People had been burned at the stake before in Rome, but never had there been such a number of victims.

Caesar and Tigellinus, in order to have done with the Christians and to suppress the plague which was spreading from the prisons all over the city, had ordered all the dungeons to be emptied, so that their remained in them only a handful of people, destined for the close of the spectacle. Consequently, when the crowds had passed the gates of the gardens, they were greatly astonished. All the main and lesser walks which led through dense groves and along lawns, thickets, ponds, and dales strewn with flowers, were studded with stakes smeared with pitch, to which the Christians were fastened. In higher places, where the view was not obstructed by trees, whole rows of stakes were to be seen, and bodies decked with flowers and ivy leaves. These rows extended over the hills and dales so far that, whereas the nearest looked like the masts of vessels, the farthest off seemed like colored darts or staffs thrust in the earth. The number of them surpassed all expectations. It seemed as if an entire nation had been fastened to the stakes to make a Roman and imperial holiday. Groups of spectators stopped before individual stakes when the form, the sex, or the age of the victims attracted them. They looked at the faces, the wreaths, the garlands of ivy, and then went on and on to other stakes, asking themselves in amazement how there could be so many guilty, or how could children scarcely able to walk unaided have set fire to Rome? The astonishment changed gradually into fear.

Meantime darkness fell and the first stars appeared in the sky. By the side of every victim appeared a slave with a lighted torch in his hand. When from various parts of the gardens came the sounds of trumpets, as a signal for the commencement of the performance, each slave put his torch under the stake. The pitch-covered straw, concealed under flowers, at once caught fire. The flames increased rapidly, withered the garlands and leap-

ing upward licked the feet of the victims. A hush fell upon the spectators. The gardens echoed with one vast groan and with cries of pain. Many of the victims, however, lifted their faces towards the starry heavens and sang hymns in praise of Christ. The people listened, but the stoniest hearts among them were touched with pity, when from the smaller stakes arose the heart-rending cries of children. "Mamma! Mamma!" A tremor shook even the spectators who were intoxicated, when they saw the little heads and innocent faces distorted with pain, or choking in the smoke which was stifling them. But the flames leaped up still higher and swept away new wreaths of roses and ivy. The flames leaped up, and in their light could be seen groups of trees, and meadows, and flowery dales. The water in pools and lakes reflected the light. The trembling leaves of the trees reddened in the glow. Everywhere it was as light as day. The odor of burning bodies filled the gardens, but immediately slaves sprinkled aloes into incense burners placed among the stakes. From the crowds arose cries, whether of compassion or delight, who could tell? The cries rose with the flames, which embraced the stakes, climbed to the breasts of victims, shrivelled with its burning breath the hair on their heads, licked their faces until they were black and charred, and then shot up higher as if to display the victory and triumph of the power at whose command they had burst forth.

At the beginning of the spectacle Caesar had appeared in a splendid chariot drawn by four white steeds and dressed as a charioteer in the color of the Greens, the party to which he and the court belonged. After him followed other chariots with courtiers in brillant costumes, senators, priests, bacchantes, with wreaths on their heads and pitchers of wine in their hands, partly drunk and uttering wild cries. By the side of these were musicians, disguised as fauns or satyrs, who played on lutes, harps, flutes and horns. In other chariots were Roman matrons and maidens, also drunk and half naked. About the chariots ran men who shook staffs decorated

with ribbons; others beat drums; others scattered flowers.

The brilliant pageant moved onward, shouting, Evoe! along the widest road of the garden, amidst the smoke and the living torches. Caesar, keeping near him Tigellinus and Chilo, whose terror he enjoyed, drove the steeds himself and proceeding slowly looked at the burning bodies and listened to the cries of the populace. Standing on the high, golden chariot, surrounded by a sea of people, who bowed to his feet, in the glare of the fire, crowned with a wreath of a circus victor, he rose above the courtiers and the crowd. He appeared gigantic. His immense arms stretched out to hold the reins, seemed to bless the people, a smile played over his face and in his blinking eyes. As a sun or a god, he shone above the throng, terrible, but splendid and mighty.

At times he stopped to look closer at some maiden whose bosom had begun to blacken in the fire, or at the face of a child distorted with agony; and then he went on leading a wild and frenzied retinue. At times he bowed to the people, and then, again, bending backward, he drew in the golden reins, and conversed with Tigellinus. Finally, when he had reached a large fountain at the crossing of two roads, he alighted from the chariot, and, beckoning to his followers, mixed with the crowd.

He was greeted with shouts and applause. The bacchantes, the nymphs, the senators and Augustales, the priest, the fauns, the satyrs and soldiers, surrounded him in an excited circle; but he, with Tigellinus on one side and Chilo on the other, walked around the fountain, about which were burning torches.

Stopping before each one, he made remarks about the victims, or ridiculed the old Greek, whose face betrayed horror and affright. At last he stopped before a tall mast decked with myrtle and ivy. The red tongues of fire had reached to the knees of the victim, but it was impossible to see his face, for fresh burning twigs veiled it with smoke. In a little while, however, a breeze turned aside the smoke and unveiled the head of an old man with white beard falling over his breast.

At sight of him Chilo wriggled like a wounded snake and gave a cry resembling a raven's caw rather than a human voice: "Glaucus! Glaucus!"

It was indeed the face of Glaucus that gazed at him from the burning stake.

The physician was still alive. His face indicated pain and was inclined forward as if he wished to look closely for the last time upon his persecutor; upon the man who had betrayed him, who had robbed him of wife and children, who had hired an assassin to kill him, and who, after all this had been forgiven in the name of Christ, had delivered him into the hands of the executioners. Never had any man outraged another in a more bloody and frightful manner. And now the victim was dying at the burning stake and the persecutor was standing at his feet. The eyes of Glaucus looked directly into those of the Greek. At times smoke hid him, but when the breeze blew this away Chilo saw again those eyes gazing at him. He tried to flee, but could not. His legs seemed to have turned into lead. He thought that some unseen hand held him before that stake. He was petrified, he felt that something had given way within him; that he had had enough of tortures and blood; that his end was approaching and that everything was vanishing—Caesar, the court, the crowds. A black and frightful solitude encircled him, in which nothing was visible save the fiery eyes of the martyr, which summoned him to judgment. Glaucus, bending his head still lower, stared fixedly at him. All present divined that something was passing between those two men. Laughter died on their lips, for in Chilo's face there was something terrible. Such fear and pain distorted it, as if the tongues of fire were burning his own flesh. Suddenly he reeled, and, stretching imploring arms upward, he cried in a terrible and heartrending voice:

"Glaucus! in the name of Christ! forgive me!" A deep silence fell all about; a shiver ran through the spectators, and all eyes were raised involuntarily. The head of the martyr moved slightly, and then from the top

of the mast there came a voice like a groan: "I forgive thee."

Chilo fell down upon his face and howled like a wild beast. Taking up sand with his hands he strewed it upon his head. Meantime the flames shot up and licked the breast and face of Glaucus. The myrtle crown upon his head began to burn, and also the ribbon on the top of the pole, the whole of which blazed with flames. Chilo rose after a time, with a face so changed, that to the Augustales he seemed like another man. His eyes shone with an extraordinary light, joy spread over his wrinkled forehead. The Greek, who a minute ago seemed so helpless, looked now like a priest inspired by divinity and panting to reveal new truths.

"What is the matter, has he gone crazy?" asked a number of voices.

But he turned towards the multitude, and, raising his right hand, cried, or rather shouted, in a voice so loud that not only the Augustales, but the multitudes, heard it: "Oh, Roman people! I swear to ye that the innocent are perishing. Behold the incendiary!" And he pointed his finger at Nero.

A hush of silence followed. The courtiers were petrified. Chilo continued to stand with arm outstretched and with finger pointing at Nero. All at once a tumult broke out. The people, like a wave urged by a whirlwind, rushed towards the old man, to get a better view of him. Here and there were heard cries "Seize him!" in other places "Woe to us!" Among the crowds arose hisses and shouts: "Bronzebeard! matricide! incendiary!" The uproars grew louder at every moment. The bacchantes, shouting wildly, sought the shelter of the chariots. Then some of the stakes, having burnt through, fell down, and, scattering sparks about them, increased the confusion. A blind, mad, wave of people caught Chilo and swept him into the interior of the garden.

The stakes began to burn through in every direction and to fall across the roads, filling the alleyways with smoke, sparks, and the smell of burnt wood and human

flesh. The nearer lights went out. It grew dark. The terrified crowds pressed towards the gates. News of what had occurred spread rapidly, and was changed and augmented as it passed from mouth to mouth. Some said that Caesar had swooned, others, that he had confessed that he had ordered Rome to be set on fire, still others that he had been taken seriously ill, and that he had been borne out in a chariot in a dying condition. Here and there were heard voices of smypathy for the Christians. "If they had not burned Rome, why, then, all this blood, torture, and injustice? Would not the gods avenge the innocent, and what sacrifices would placate them?" The words, "innocent people" were repeated oftener and oftener. Women expressed aloud their pity for the children, so many of whom had been thrown to wild beasts, or had been crucified or burned in those cursed gardens. Finally compassion changed into maledictions against Caesar and Tigellinus. There were some also who asked themselves, or others, "What kind of a God is this who gives such strength to meet torture and death?" And they went towards their homes in meditation.

Chilo, however, roamed about the gardens, not knowing where to go or what to do. Again he felt himself a sick and helpless old man. Now he stumbled over half-burned corpses; now he trod on embers which sent after him a shower of sparks; now he sat down and gazed about him with a vacant stare. Already the gardens were becoming dark. The trees no longer stood out in a red glare. Only the pale moon lighted the alleys, the dark pillars fallen across them, and the partly consumed victims changed into formless lumps. But the old Greek thought that still in the moonlight he could see the face of Glaucus, with eyes fixed upon him. Shunning the light he hid himself amid the shadows. Finally, however, he emerged again, and, as if led by some hidden force, directed his steps towards the fountain beside which Glaucus had expired. A hand touched his shoulder. The old man turned and seeing an unknown per-

son before him, cried out with terror: "Who art thou?"

"Paul of Tarsus, the Apostle."

"I am accursed. What dost thou desire?"

"I wish to save thee."

Chilo leaned against a tree. His legs trembled beneath him, and his arms hung down by his sides.

"There is no salvation for me," he said despairingly.

"Hast thou not heard that Christ forgave the thief upon the cross?" asked Paul.

"Dost thou know what I have done?"

"I beheld thy distress, and heard thee bear witness to the truth."

"Oh, master!"

"The servant of Christ forgave thee in the hour of agony and death. Why then should not Christ forgive thee?"

Chilo bowed his head on his hands as if bewildered.

"Forgiveness! forgiveness! for me?"

"Our God is a God of mercy," said the Apostle.

"For me?" repeated Chilo, and he began to groan like a man who is too feeble to restrain his pain and suffering.

"Take my arm, and come with me."

And taking him upon his arm, Paul went towards the crossing of the roads, guided by the murmur of the fountain, which seemed to mourn in the stillness of the night, over the bodies of the martyrs.

"Our God is a God of mercy," said the Apostle again. "Wert thou to stand on the shore and cast pebbles into the sea couldst thou fill up its depths? I tell thee that the mercy of Christ is like the sea, and that the sins and transgressions of men disappear in it like the pebbles; I tell thee that it is like the sky which covers lands and mountains and seas, for it is everywhere and is without limit and without end. Thou hast suffered at the stake of Glaucus. Christ beheld thy anguish. Regardless of what might happen on the morrow thou didst say, 'Behold the incendiary!' Christ will remember thy words. Thy depravity and falsehood are gone. In thy heart

there remains only contrition. Follow me and hearken to my words. I am he who hated Christ and persecuted the elect. I did not desire Him and did not believe in Him, until He appeared before me and called me. Since that time He is my love. And now He has visited thee with compunction, and fear, and agony, in order to call thee to Himself. Thou didst hate Him, but He loved thee. Thou didst deliver His followers to torture, but He will forgive thee and save thee."

Great sobs shook the breast of the wretched man and rent his soul to its depths. But Paul embraced him, comforted him and led him away as a soldier leads a captive.

After a time the Apostle spoke again:

"Come with me, I will lead thee to Him, for why else would I come to thee? He commanded me to gather souls in the name of love, and I obey His command. Thou believest thyself to be damned, but I say to thee: 'Believe in Him and salvation awaits thee.' Thou considerest that thou art hated, but I tell thee once more that He loves thee. Look at me! When I possessed Him not, I possessed nothing save the malice which dwelt in my heart, but now His love takes the place of father and mother, of riches and power. In Him alone is refuge. He will consider thy penitence, will have mercy on thy misery, will free thee from fear and raise thee to Himself."

So speaking, he led him to the fountain, whose silvery spray gleamed in the light of the moon. Silence reigned all about and the gardens were deserted, for slaves had already removed the charred stakes and the bodies of the martyrs.

Chilo fell upon his knees with a groan, and, hiding his face in his hands, remained motionless. But Paul raised his face towards the stars and prayed—"O Lord, behold this wretched man, his sorrow, his tears, and his agony! O Lord of mercy, who didst shed Thy blood for our sins, forgive him through Thy passion, Thy death, and Thy resurrection."

Then he was silent, but for a long time he looked upward at the stars and prayed. Meantime at his feet arose a cry like a groan.

"O Christ! forgive me!"

Then Paul approached the fountain, and, dipping water in his hand, he returned to the kneeling wretch.

"Chilo! I baptize thee, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Chilo raised his head, and, crossing his arms, remained motionless. The moon shone full upon his white hairs and upon the equally white face still, as if dead, or chiselled out of stone. The moments passed. From the great Aviaries in the gardens of Domitian came the crowing of cocks; but Chilo remained in his kneeling posture, like a monument. Finally he arose and said to the Apostle:

"What shall I do before death?"

Paul, roused from his meditation on the boundless power that moved even such minds as that of the Greek, answered: "Have faith, and testify to the truth."

They went out together. At the gates of the garden the Apostle blessed the old man once more, and then they parted. Chilo insisted upon this, because he foresaw that after what had happened both Caesar and Tigellinus would give orders that he should be pursued.

His presentiment was fulfilled. When he returned home he found the house surrounded by pretorians, who seized him, and, under the direction of Scevinus, took him to the palace.

Caesar had retired, but Tigellinus was waiting. As soon as he saw the wretched Greek, he greeted him with a calm though ominous face.

"Thou art guilty of treason," said he, "and punishment will not be spared thee. But shouldst thou confess to-morrow in the ante-chamber that thou wert drunk and mad and that the instigators of the conflagrations were the Christians, thy punishment will be reduced to flogging and expulsion."

"I cannot do that," said Chilo.

Tigellinus approached him with a slow step and said in a low but terrible voice: "How is that, dog, wert thou not drunk and dost thou not understand what is awaiting thee? Look there," and he pointed to a corner of the chamber, where, beside the long wooden bench, stood four Thracian slaves, with cords and pincers in their hands.

But Chilo replied: "I cannot."

Rage seized Tigellinus, but he restrained himself. "Hast thou seen," he asked, "how Christians die? Dost thou wish to die in the same way?"

The old man raised his pale face. His lips moved silently for a time; then he said: "I also believe in Christ."

Tigellinus looked at him in surprise. "Dog! art thou mad?"

Suddenly the rage which had accumulated in his breast burst forth. Springing at Chilo he caught his beard with both hands, threw him to the floor and trampled on him, repeating, with foam upon his lips: "Thou shalt retract, thou shalt."

"I cannot," said the prostrate Chilo.

"Take him to the rack."

At this order the Thracians seized the old man and laid him on the bench, then, fastening him to it with cords, they began to squeeze his lean legs with pincers. But he kissed their hands with humility, as they bound him to the bench, and then he closed his eyes and seemed dead.

He was alive, however, for when Tigellinus bent over him and asked him once more: "Wilt thou retract?" his pale lips moved slightly and he whispered: "I cannot."

Tigellinus ordered the torture to be stopped. Helpless, his face distorted by anger, he strode up and down the room. At last a new thought came into his head. He turned to the Thracians and said: "Tear out his tongue!"

CHAPTER XX

The drama entitled "Aureolus" was usually performed in theatres or amphitheatres, so arranged that they could open and present, as it were, two separate stages. But after the spectacle in Caesar's gardens this device was discarded; for in this case it was essential that the greatest number of spectators could enjoy the death of a crucified slave, who is devoured by a bear. In the theatre the role of the bear was played by an actor sewed up in a bear-skin, but this time a real bear was to appear on the scene. This was a new device of Tigellinus. At first Caesar announced that he would not come, but at the urgent request of his favorite he changed his mind. Tigellinus convinced him that after what had happened in the gardens he ought to show himself to the people, and at the same time assured him that the crucified slave would not abuse him, as had Crispus. The people were becoming sated and tired of bloodshed, consequently a new distribution of lottery tickets and gifts was announced, as well as a banquet, for the performance was to be given at night in a brilliantly illuminated amphitheatre.

By dusk the whole building was packed. The Augustales, with Tigellinus at their head, came in a body, not so much for the sake of the performers as to show their devotion to Caesar and their opinion of Chilo, about whom all Rome was talking.

It was rumored that Caesar, after his return from the gardens, had fallen into a frenzy and could not sleep, that fears and strange apparitions tormented him, in consequence of which he announced the next morning that he would soon depart for Achaea. But others denied this and expressed an opinion that Caesar would now be all the more relentless against the Christians. Cowards also were not lacking, who predicted that the accusa-

tion which Chilo had flung into Caesar's face might have the worst possible consequences. Finally there were others, who, through humanity, petitioned Tigellinus to stop further persecution.

"Behold what is happening!" said Barcus Soranus; "thou wished to satisfy the anger of the people and to convince them that the guilty were being punished, but the result is just the opposite."

"That is true," added Antiscius Verus; "all now whisper to one another that the Christians are innocent. If that be cleverness, then Chilo was right in saying that thy brains would not fill an acorn's cup."

Tigellinus turned to them and said: "Barcus Soranus, people also whisper that thy daughter Servilla screened her Christian slaves from the justice of Caesar. The same thing they say also of thy wife, Antiscius."

"That is false!" exclaimed Barcus, in alarm.

"Thy divorced women," said Antiscius Verus, with equal alarm, "wished to ruin my wife because they are envious of her virtue."

But others talked of Chilo.

"What is the matter with him?" said Eprius Marcelus, "he himself delivered the Christians into the hands of Tigellinus; from a beggar he became wealthy; it was possible for him to live out his days in peace, to have a grand funeral and a fine tomb, but now what has happened? All at once he chooses to lose everything and ruin himself; without doubt he must be mad."

"He is not mad, but he has become a Christian," said Tigellinus.

"Impossible!" said Vitelius.

"Have I not said," remarked Vestinius, "that ye may butcher Christians, but ye cannot war against their Deity! It is no joking matter. See what is taking place. I did not set Rome on fire, but should Caesar permit me I should immediately sacrifice a hecatomb to the Christian God. And all should do the same thing, because, I repeat, it is no joking matter. Remember what I have said."

"And I said something else," said Petronius. "Tigellinus laughed at me when I asserted that the Christians were arming, but now I say more, they are conquering."

"How is that; what do you mean?" asked a number of voices.

"By Pollux! if such a man as Chilo could not resist them, who can? If you think that after every spectacle the numbers of Christians do not increase, then you had better become potters or barbers, for you will then find out what people think and what is going on in the city."

"He speaks the truth, by the holy garment of Diana!" cried Vestinius.

But Barcus turned to Petronius, and said: "What is thy conclusion?"

"I conclude where thou didst begin, there has been enough of bloodshed."

Tigellinus looked at him scornfully, and said: "Nay, a little more."

"If thy head does not suffice thee, thou hast another on thy cane," retorted Petronius.

The arrival of Caesar interrupted the conversation. Caesar took his place, with Pythagoras next to him. The performance of "Aureolus" began immediately, but nobody paid much attention to it, for the minds of the audience were fixed on Chilo. The people, tired of torture and blood, began to hiss and to shout out uncomplimentary remarks and to call for the bear scene, which was the only thing they cared to see. Had it not been for the promised gifts and the hope of seeing Chilo the show would not have held the crowd.

At length the looked-for moment came. The circus servants first brought in a wooden cross, low enough to allow the bear, standing on his hind legs, to reach the breast of the victim; then two men dragged in Chilo, for, as the bones in his legs were broken, he could not walk. He was nailed to the cross so quickly that the curious Augustales had not a good look at him, and only after the cross had been fixed in the place prepared for it did all eyes gain a view of the victim. But few could recog-

nize Chilo in this naked old man. After the tortures which Tigellinus had inflicted, not a drop of blood remained in his face, and only on his beard was to be seen a red spot caused by the blood after his tongue had been torn out. It was almost possible to see his bones through the transparent skin. He seemed to have grown much older also. His eyes formerly had cast glances filled with malice and ill-will, his face had before reflected alarm and uncertainty, but now, though it had an expression of pain, it was calm and serene as the faces of the sleeping or the dead. Perhaps he was comforted by the memory of the crucified thief whom Christ forgave, or perhaps he said in his soul, to the merciful God:

"O Lord! I bit like a venomous worm, but all my life I was unfortunate; I was hungry, but people trampled upon me, beat me, and jeered at me. I was poor and very unhappy, and now they put me to torture, and I am hanging on a cross! But Thou, O merciful One! will not reject me in the hour of my death." Evidently peace came to his penitent heart. No one laughed, for in this crucified man there was something pathetic, he seemed so old, so defenseless, so feeble, and his humility invited compassion, so that each one asked himself why men should be crucified and nailed to crosses, who would soon die in any case. The crowd was silent. Among the pretorians Vestinius, looking to right and left, whispered in a frightened voice, "See how they die!" Others were looking for the bear and wishing a speedy end to the spectacle.

The bear appeared at last in the arena, and, swaying his drooping head from side to side, he looked about as if seeking for something. When he saw the cross, with the naked body upon it, he approached and stood on his hind legs. After a moment he dropped down, and, sitting beneath the cross, began to growl as if in his heart there were pity for this poor remnant of a man.

The servants of the circus urged on the bear with cries, but the people were silent. Meanwhile Chilo raised his head slowly, and looked at the audience for some time;

at last his eyes rested somewhere among the highest tiers of the amphitheatre; his breast began to heave, and then appeared something which caused wonder and astonishment. His face lighted with a smile, a ray of light seemed to encircle his forehead, his eyes were raised, and two great tears rolled down his cheeks.

Suddenly he expired.

And at the same moment a man's voice rang out from under the awning:

"Peace to the martyrs!"

In the amphitheatre deep silence reigned.

CHAPTER XXI

After the performance in Caesar's gardens, the prisons were almost empty. New victims, indeed, suspected of the Oriental superstition, were still seized and imprisoned; but fewer and fewer people were captured, so that it was difficult to fill out the programme of the spectacles which were approaching. The people had become sated with blood; they evinced great weariness and increasing alarm on account of the unparalleled conduct of the victims. Fears like those of the superstitious Vestinius spread among thousands of people. More and more the people talked of the vengefulness of the Christian God. The prison fever, which had spread all over the city, increased the general dread. Funerals were frequent. It was reported that fresh victims were needed to placate the unknown God. In the temples, sacrifices were offered to Jove and Libitina. At last, in spite of all the efforts of Tigellinus and his followers, the belief spread rapidly that the city had been set on fire at the command of Caesar, and that the Christians were suffering innocently.

But for this very reason, Nero and Tigellinus continued the persecution. To placate the people fresh orders were issued to distribute corn, wine, and oil. New

rules were proclaimed to facilitate the rebuilding of houses, and these rules granted special privileges to the owners. New ordinances were given out also as to the width of the streets and the materials to be used for building, so as to avoid fires in the future. Caesar himself participated in the sessions of the Senate and counselled with the "Fathers" as to the welfare of the people and the city; but no favor was granted to the doomed. The ruler of the world desired to impress upon the people the idea that such cruel punishment could be inflicted only upon the guilty. In the Senate no voice was raised in behalf of the Christians, for no one cared to risk Caesar's wrath. Besides, those who looked into the future asserted that the very foundations of the Roman Empire were threatened by the new creed.

The dead and the dying were given to their families, as the Roman law took no vengeance on the dead. Vinitius consoled himself to some extent with the thought that should Lygia die, he would bury her in his family vault, and himself rest alongside of her. He lost all hope of saving her from death. Half separated from life and absorbed in Christ, he did not now dream of any union save an eternal one. His faith had become so strong that eternity seemed to him something incomparably more real and true than the fleeting existence which he had lived up to that time. His heart overflowed with happiness. While yet alive, he had become transformed into an almost immaterial being, which, longing after a complete deliverance for itself, desired it also for another. He imagined that, when freed from earthly bondage, he and Lygia would go hand in hand to heaven, where Christ would bless them, and allow them to live forever in a light like that of the dawn. He only implored Christ to save Lygia from the torments of the circus, and let her fall asleep in the prison, feeling that he himself would die simultaneously. In view of the enormous amount of blood which had been shed, he could not hope that she alone would be saved. He had heard from Peter and Paul that they, too, must die as

martyrs. The sight of Chilo on the cross had convinced him that the death of a martyr could be sweet. Hence, he desired it for both himself and Lygia, as a change from a sad and wretched condition to something better.

At times he experienced a foretaste of the after life. The sadness which hung over the souls of both was gradually losing its former burning bitterness, and changing into a peaceful and heavenly submission to the will of God. Vinitius, who formerly had striven against the current, and had struggled and tortured himself, now let himself drift, believing that the stream would bear him into eternal rest. He divined also that Lygia, as well as himself, was preparing for death; that despite the walls of the prison which separated them, they were going onward together, and this thought brought him much happiness.

In fact, they were going onward together, just as if they had exchanged thoughts every day. Lygia had no desire or hope save the hope of an after life. She looked upon death, not only as a deliverance from the terrible walls of the prison, from the hands of Caesar and Tigellinus, but as the wedding day with Vinitius. Besides this certainty, all else lost importance. After death there would begin for her even earthly happiness, so that she awaited it as a bride waits for the wedding day.

The great current of faith which swept thousands of believers away from life and bore them beyond the grave seized Ursus also. He also, for a long time, could not resign himself to the thought of Lygia's death. But when every day, through the prison walls, came into the prison news of what was going on in the amphitheatre and in the gardens, when death seemed the inevitable lot of all Christians, and also their good, higher than any earthly idea of happiness, Ursus did not dare to ask Christ to deprive Lygia of such bliss, or delay it for long years to come. In his simple barbarian soul he thought, also, that the daughter of the Lygian chief would possess more of those heavenly delights than the

common crowd to which he himself belonged, and that she would sit nearer to the Lamb than others. Though he had heard that before God all are equal, still a conviction lingered at the bottom of his soul that the daughter of a chief, the chief of all the Lygians, was much better than a slave. He hoped, also, that Christ would allow him to continue to serve her. His dearest wish was to die on the cross like the Lamb, but this he considered bliss so great that he did not dare to pray for it. Although he knew that in Rome even the lowest criminals were crucified, he thought that he would certainly have to perish torn by the teeth and claws of wild beasts. This was a source of sorrow to him. From his childhood he had roamed through forests in pursuit of wild animals. While still a youth, thanks to his superhuman strength, he had become famous as a hunter among the Lygians. Hunting was his chief delight, so much so that later, when in Rome, he visited the menagerie and the amphitheatres, just to look at beasts, known and unknown to him. The sight of these incited within him a great desire for struggle and killing. So now he feared that when he should meet the beasts in the arena, he would be possessed by thoughts unbecoming a Christian, whose duty was to die piously and patiently. But he committed himself to Christ, and found other thoughts to console him. Hearing that the Lamb had declared war against the powers of hell and evil spirits, which, according to the Christian creed, included the pagan gods, he thought that in this conflict he might be of considerable service to the Lamb, and serve Him all the better, because he believed that his soul must be stronger than that of others. He prayed through entire days, rendered service to the prisoners, helped the jailers, and consoled his princess, who regretted at times that in her short life she had not been able to perform as many good deeds as the famous Tabitha, of whom the Apostle Peter had told her. Even the prison guards, who feared the great strength of the giant, since neither chains nor bars could restrain it, took a liking to him for his gentleness. Amazed at his se-

renity, they asked him the cause. He spoke with such certitude of the life that awaited him after death, that they listened with astonishment, seeing for the first time that happiness might come into a dungeon whither the sun's rays could not penetrate. And when he exhorted them to believe in the Lamb, it struck more than one of them that his own service was the service of a slave, and his life the life of a wretched being, and more than one fell to thinking over his lot, the end of which was death. But death brought new fear and promised nothing, whereas the giant and the maiden, who resembled a flower cast upon the floor of the prison—these two looked upon death with delight, as the gate of happiness.

CHAPTER XXII

On a certain evening Scevinus, a senator, called upon Petronius and conversed with him at length about the grievous times in which they lived, and also about Caesar. He spoke so openly that Petronius, though friendly, thought it best to be on his guard. Scevinus complained that the world was becoming mad, and that all must end in some calamity more terrible even than the burning of Rome. He said that even the Augustales were discontented; that Fenius Rufus, second prefect of the pretorians, endured only with the greatest effort the vile rule of Tigellinus; and that Seneca's entire family had been driven to the utmost despair by the conduct of Caesar towards his old master and towards Lucan. Finally, he began to speak of the dissatisfaction of the people, and even of the pretorians, a considerable part of whom had been won over by Fenius Rufus.

"Why dost thou talk in this manner?" asked Petronius.

"Out of solicitude for Caesar," replied Scevinus. "I have a distant relative among the pretorians, whose name is also Scevinus; from him I learn what is going on in the camp. Discontent is growing there also. Caligula was mad, and see what happened—Cassius Chaerea ap-

peared. It was a terrible deed, and no one of us applauded it; but still Chaerea freed the world from a monster."

"Or, in other words," remarked Petronius, "this is thy meaning: I do not praise Chaerea, but he was an excellent man, and would that the gods gave us more like him."

Scevinus changed the subject, and began of a sudden to praise Piso, glorifying his family, his generosity, his attachment to his wife, and finally his intellect, his calmness, and his peculiar gift of winning people.

"Caesar is childless," said he, "and all see his successor in Piso. Doubtless every one would help Piso to ascend the throne. Fenius Rufus loves him, the family of Annaeus is entirely devoted to him. Plautius Lateranus and Tullius Senecio would go through fire for him. Equally devoted to him are Natalius, and Subrius Flavius, and Sulpicius Asper, and Atranius Quinetianus, and even Vestinius."

"The last will not be of much avail to Piso," said Petronius. "Vestinius is afraid of his own shadow."

"Vestinius believes in dreams and apparitions," said Scevinus, "but he is a valiant man, who, rumor says, will be nominated for Council. If in his heart he is opposed to persecuting the Christians, thou shouldst not blame him for it, for it concerns thee also that this madness should cease."

"Not me, but Vinitius," said Petronius. "On his account, I should like to save a certain girl, but I cannot, because I have lost favor with Caesar."

"How is that? Dost thou not see that Caesar wishes to be friendly with thee again? And I will tell thee why. He intends returning to Achaea, where he will sing Greek songs of his own composition. He is crazy about the trip, but trembles at the thought of the critical disposition of the Greeks. He imagines that a great triumph awaits him or a great failure. He needs good advice, and he knows that no one can counsel him as well as

thou. That is the reason why thou art returning to favor."

"Lucan might take my place."

"Bronzebeard hates Lucan, and destines him for death. He is awaiting a pretext, for he always seeks pretexts. Lucan understands that it is necessary to make haste."

"By Castor!" said Petronius, "this may be. But I have still another way to regain favor."

"What is it?"

"To repeat to Bronzebeard what thou hast said to me just now."

"I have said nothing," said Scevinus, aghast.

Petronius laid his hand upon the other's shoulder.

"Thou hast called Caesar a madman, thou hast predicted the succession of Piso, and thou hast said Lucan understands that it is necessary to make haste. What wouldst thou hasten, my dear friend?"

Scevinus grew pale, and for a moment the two looked at each other.

"Thou wilt not repeat,"

"By the hips of Cypris, I will not! Thou knowest me well; no, I will not repeat. I have not heard anything, and I do not wish to hear anything. Dost thou understand? Life is too short to take any trouble. I pray thee only to visit Tigellinus to-day and talk with him as long as thou hast with me, about anything that may please thee."

"What for?"

"So that should Tigellinus some day say to me 'Scevinus was with thee,' I might retort, 'That same day he was also with thee.'"

Scevinus, hearing this, broke the ivory cane which he held in his hand, and said, "I will see Tigellinus to-day, and afterwards I will go to Nerva's banquet. Wilt not thou be there? But anyway we shall see each other the day after to-morrow in the amphitheatre, where the remainder of the Christians will appear. Farewell."

"The day after to-morrow," repeated Petronius, when

alone. "There is no time to lose. Bronzebeard will need me in Achaea, hence he may perhaps show some regard for my wishes." And he determined to try the last means.

At Nerva's banquet Caesar himself asked that Petronius should occupy the seat opposite him, because he wished to ask his advice about Achaea and about what cities he might appear in with the greatest chances of success. He feared most the Athenians. Other Augustales listened to the conversation with attention, so as to retain in their memory the opinions of Petronius, and repeat them afterwards as their own.

"It seems to me as if I had not lived until this time," said Nero, "and that I shall be born only in Greece."

"Thou wilt be born to new fame and immortality," said Petronius.

"I trust that it will be so, and that Apollo will not be jealous. Should I meet success I will offer to him a hecatomb such as no god has ever had before."

Scevinus quoted the lines of Horace:

"Sic te diva potens, Cypri,
Sic frates Helenae, lucida sidera,
Ventorumque regat Pater."

"The vessel is waiting at Naples," said Caesar. "I should like to set out even to-morrow."

Petronius arose and, looking straight at Nero, said: "Permit me, O divine one, first to celebrate a wedding feast, to which I shall invite thee before others."

"A wedding feast? What wedding feast?" asked Nero.

"The wedding feast of Vinitius with the daughter of the king of the Lygians, who is thy hostage. Though she is now in prison, as a hostage she is not subject to imprisonment. Thou thyself didst permit Vinitius to marry her; and as thy decrees, like those of Zeus, are unchangeable, thou wilt order her to be set free, and I will give her to the bridegroom."

The cool and calm self-possession with which Petronius

spoke impressed Nero, who was always impressed by this method of addressing him.

"I know," he said, with his eyes cast down. "I have thought of her, and of the giant who choked Croto."

"Then both are saved?" asked Petronius quietly.

But Tigellinus came to the rescue of his master.

"She is in prison at the command of Caesar, and thou thyself hast said, Petronius, that his decrees are unchangeable."

All present, knowing the history of Vinitius and Lygia, understood the situation, and they preserved silence, curious to see how the affair would end.

"She is in prison against the will of Caesar, through thy mistake, and through thy ignorance of the law of nations," replied Petronius, laying stress upon his words. "Thou art a dull man, Tigellinus, but even thou darest not assert that she set Rome on fire, for Caesar would not believe thee."

But Nero had recovered himself. Through his half-closed eyes shone indescribable malice.

"Petronius is right," he said after awhile.

Tigellinus looked at him with surprise.

"Petronius is right," repeated Nero. "To-morrow the gates of the prison will be opened for her. As to the wedding feast, we will talk it over the day after to-morrow in the amphitheatre."

"I have lost again," thought Petronius.

When he had returned home he was so sure that Lygia's fate had been decided, that he sent a trustworthy servant to the amphitheatre to make arrangements for the delivery of her body, which he wished to give to Vinitius.

CHAPTER XXIII

During Nero's reign evening exhibitions in the circus and amphitheatre had been common. Before that time exhibitions at night were rare. They were popular

among the Augustales, because they were often followed by feasts and revels which lasted until the morning. Though the people had had enough of bloodshed, still when the news was spread that the end of the games was approaching, and that the last of the Christians were to expire during the night performance, great crowds filled the amphitheatre. The Augustales appeared in a body, for they understood that this would be an unusual performance, and they knew that Caesar had determined to make a tragic show of the agony of Vinitius. Tigellinus had not betrayed what kind of torture was intended for the bride of the young Tribune. But this only increased the general curiosity. Those who had seen Lygia at the house of Plautius extolled her beauty to the skies. Others were mainly concerned with the question as to whether they would really see her in the arena that night, because many of those who had heard the reply of Caesar to Petronius gave it a double meaning. Some believed that Nero would deliver, or perhaps had already delivered, the maiden to Vinitius. They remembered that she was a hostage, and hence could worship any god she pleased, and that the law of nations did not allow her to be punished.

Uncertainty, expectation, and curiosity possessed all the spectators. Caesar arrived earlier than usual. Immediately on his coming, conjectures were whispered about that something unusual would happen, for beside Tigellinus and Vatinius, Caesar had with him Cassius, a centurion of enormous size and strength, whom Caesar took with him only when he needed a defender—for instance, on his night escapades to the Suburra. Here he enjoyed an amusement called "Saggatio," which consisted in tossing on a soldier's cloak every maiden he met on his way. It was noted, also, that precautions had been taken in the amphitheatre itself. The pretorian guards were increased, and they were commanded, not by a centurion, but by the Tribune Subrius Flavius, known for his blind attachment to Nero. It was generally understood that Caesar wished in any case to secure himself against an

outburst of despair from Vinitius, and this added to the interest.

All eyes were turned upon the seat occupied by the unfortunate lover. He was very pale, and his forehead was covered with perspiration. He was uncertain as to Lygia's fate, as with the other spectators, but also he was alarmed to the very depths of his soul. Petronius, ignorant himself of what would happen, said nothing to him, except that when he had returned from Nerva's banquet he had asked Vinitius whether he was prepared for everything, and then whether he would be present at the performance. To both questions Vinitius answered yes, but a shudder passed through him, because he surmised that Petronius did not ask these questions without reason. For some time he had been only half alive; he had been sunk in death, and had consented to Lygia's death, since for both it was to be a deliverance and a marriage. But now he realized that it is one thing to meditate over the last moment as if it were to be a calm falling into sleep, and another thing to behold the agonies of a person dearer than life to him. All his former anguish came back again. The despair which he had repressed began again to cry in his soul; he felt again the old desire to save Lygia at any price. In the morning he had tried to get into the prison to be sure that she was there. But the pretorian guards watched all the entrances, and the orders were so strict that even the soldiers whom Vinitius knew personally could not be moved by entreaties or bribes. It seemed to Vinitius that uncertainty would kill him before the spectacle came off. In his heart there still lingered a faint hope that Lygia was not in the amphitheatre, and that his fears were groundless. At times he clung to this hope with all his strength. He thought to himself that Christ might have taken her to Himself from the prison. He only knew that he could not bear to witness her agony in the circus. Formerly he had submitted in everything to the Divine Will, but now, when repulsed from the doors of the prison, he returned to his seat in the amphitheatre.

From the curious eyes directed towards him he inferred that the most terrible conjectures might prove true, and in his soul he implored help with a passion that resembled a menace. "Thou canst!" he repeated, clenching his fist convulsively, "Thou canst!" He had not realized heretofore that this moment would be so terrible. Now his mind was clouded, and he felt that if he should see Lygia tortured, his love for God would change into hatred and his faith into despair. He was terror-stricken at the same time, for he feared to offend Christ, whom he was imploring for mercy and miracles. He asked no longer for her life, but only that she might die before being led into the arena. With unspeakable anguish he repeated in his heart:

"Refuse me not this one request, and I will love Thee more than I have hitherto loved Thee." Then his thoughts raged like waves tossed about by a hurricane. A desire for blood and vengeance arose in him. He was seized with a mad desire to swoop down upon Caesar and choke him in the presence of all the spectators, but he felt this desire was an offense against Christ and His command. At times flashes of hope whirled through his brain that an Almighty and Merciful Hand would turn away all that his sword feared. But these hopes vanished before his overwhelming despair, as he thought that He who could destroy that circus with a word and save Lygia, had abandoned her, though she trusted in Him and loved Him with all her pure heart. And he thought, moreover, that she was lying in the dark dungeon, weak, defenseless, deserted, dependent upon the mercy of the brutal guards, drawing perhaps her last breath, while he had to wait in that horrible amphitheatre, not knowing what torture was destined for her, or what the next moment might bring forth. Finally, like a man who, falling down a precipice, grasps at everything that grows on the edge of it, so did he grasp frantically at the thought that faith alone could save her. This means alone was left. Peter had said that faith could move the earth to its very foundations. Therefore, he con-

centrated his thoughts, hushed his misgivings, and compressed his whole being into the sentence, "I believe," and awaited a miracle.

As a cord stretched too tightly may break, so he was broken by the strain. A deathly pallor covered his face. His body relaxed. Then he thought that his prayer had been heard, and that he was dying. He thought that Lygia must have died, and that Christ was taking them both to Himself. The arena, the white robes of the countless spectators, the lights of innumerable lamps and torches, all vanished from his sight.

His weakness did not last long. In a moment he awoke, or, rather, was awakened by a stamping of the expectant multitude.

"Thou art ill," said Petronius; "give orders that thou be taken home." Regardless of what Caesar would say, he rose to support Vinitius and leave with him. His heart was full of compassion. Moreover, he was vexed beyond endurance by the fact that Caesar was gazing through the emerald at Vinitius, and studying his agony with satisfaction, perhaps in order to describe it afterwards in pathetic verses and gain the applause of an audience.

But Vinitius shook his head. He might die in the amphitheatre, but he could not leave it. Moreover, the spectacle might begin at any moment.

Indeed, at that instant the prefect of the city waved a red handkerchief. Upon this signal the hinges of the doors opposite Caesar's box creaked, and out of the dark chasm came Ursus, into the brightly illuminated arena.

The giant blinked, evidently dazzled by the brightness of the arena; then he moved towards the centre, looking about as if to see what he had to encounter. All the Augustales and most of the spectators knew that this was the man who had strangled Croto; hence at his appearance murmurs arose from all the benches. There was no lack of gladiators in Rome larger in stature than ordinary men, but Roman eyes had never seen the like of

Ursus. Cassius, who stood by Caesar, appeared puny in comparison. Senators, vestals, Caesar, the Augustales, and the people gazed with the delight of experts at his powerful limbs, like the trunks of trees; at his breast, which seemed like two joined shields, and at his herculean arms. The murmurs grew louder at every moment. For the multitudes there could not be any greater pleasure than to see those muscles play in the exertion of struggle. The murmurs changed to shouts and to eager questionings: "Where live the tribes who produce such giants?" Ursus stood there in the middle of the amphitheatre naked, resembling a stone Colossus rather than a man. Calm, collected, yet at the same time with the melancholy of a barbarian. Looking about the empty arena, he fixed his blue eyes in wonderment, now on the spectators, now on Caesar, now on the gratings of the dungeons, whence he expected his executioners.

At the moment when he stepped into the arena his simple heart was throbbing with the hope that death on the cross was awaiting him. But when he saw neither a cross nor a pit, he thought that he did not deserve such favor, and that he would have to perish in some other way, most probably from wild beasts. He was unarmed, and had resolved to die as became a follower of the Lamb, peacefully and patiently. Meanwhile, he wished to pray to the Saviour. So, kneeling in the arena, he joined his hands and raised his eyes to the stars, which twinkled above the lofty opening on the arena.

This attitude displeased the crowds. They had had enough of those Christians who died like sheep; they understood that should the giant refuse to defend himself, the spectacle would be a failure. Here and there hisses arose. Some cried for the scourgers, whose office it was to chastise combatants who refused to fight. But silence soon followed, for no one knew what awaited the giant, nor whether he would not be ready to fight when he looked death in the face.

Indeed, they had not long to wait. Suddenly a deafening noise of trumpets arose, and at this signal a grating

opened opposite the imperial box, and into the arena rushed, amid the shouts of the people, an enormous German bull, bearing on his horns the naked body of a woman.

"Lygia! Lygia!" cried Vinitius.

Then he seized his hair near the temples, writhed like a man wounded by a spear, and in a hoarse voice cried out:

"I believe! I believe! Grant a miracle, O Christ!"

He was not aware that Petronius, at that moment, covered his head with a toga. He thought that death or agony had covered his eyes. He did not look. He did not see. A feeling of awful emptiness seized him. No thought remained in his head, only his lips repeated, as if in delirium: "I believe! I believe!"

Suddenly the amphitheatre was hushed. The Augustales rose in their seats as one man, for something uncommon had happened in the arena. The Lygian, humble and ready to die, seeing his princess on the horns of the wild beast, sprang up as if burned by fire, and bending forward, rushed towards the frenzied animal.

Cries of astonishment were heard on all sides. The Lygian overtook in a twinkling the raging bull, and seized him by the horns.

"Look!" cried Petronius, unveiling the head of Vinitius. Vinitius raised his face, pale as a sheet, and he looked at the arena with a glassy, vacant stare.

Every one held his breath. In the amphitheatre a fly might have been heard. People could not believe their own eyes. Never before was seen anything like this.

The Lygian held the wild beast by the horns. His feet were buried in the sand to his ankles. His back was bent like a bow. His head was hidden between his shoulders. The muscles swelled on his arms so that the skin seemed to crack from the pressure, but he stopped the bull on the spot. The man and the brute remained so motionless that the spectators seemed to look at a picture representing a deed of Hercules or Theseus, or a group cut in stone. But in that apparent repose was evident the terrible exertion of two struggling forces. The

bull as well as the man sank his feet deep into the sand, and his dark, shaggy body was so curved that it resembled a huge ball. Which would first be exhausted? Which first would yield? This was the question which at the moment was of greater importance to the spectators than their own fate, than that of Rome and its rule over the world. The Lygian, in their eyes, was a demigod, worthy of admiration and statues. Caesar himself arose. He and Tigellinus, hearing of the strength of this man, had purposely prepared the spectacle, and laughing to each other, had said: "Let the slayer of Croto vanquish the bull chosen by us." But now they looked with amazement at the picture before them, hardly believing that it could be real. There were some of the spectators who had raised their arms and remained in this attitude. Sweat poured down the faces of others, as if they themselves were struggling with the animal. In the circus nothing was heard save the hiss of the flames in the lamps and the crackle of the torches. Words died in the throats of the spectators, but their hearts beat against their breasts as if to split them. It seemed to all that the struggle was lasting for ages.

But the man and the brute continued motionless in their terrible struggle. They seemed rooted in the earth.

Suddenly there reverberated through the arena a muffled roar, and then a shout arose from the spectators and then again silence fell. The people saw as in a dream that the monstrous head of the bull was twisting around in the iron grasp of the barbarian. The Lygian's face, neck and arms grew purple, his back curved still more. He was evidently rallying the rest of his superhuman strength. But he could not stand the strain much longer.

Gradually the groans of the bull grew hoarser and duller and more painful as they mingled with the whistling breath of the giant. The head of the brute was twisted more and more. A long, foaming tongue protruded from its muzzle. Next instant the crack of breaking bones reached the ears of the nearest spectators; then the beast sunk to the earth with a broken neck.

In a twinkling the giant slipped the cords from the horns of the bull, and, panting, raised the maiden in his arms. His face had paled, his hair was matted with sweat, his arms and shoulders were wet as though with water. For a moment he stood as if he were scarce conscious, then he lifted his eyes and gazed around the amphitheatre.

The immense audience had gone wild. The walls of the building had trembled from the shouts of tens of thousands of spectators. Since the beginning of the games no such enthusiasm had ever been known. Those who occupied the higher tiers left them and crowded down the aisles between the seats, in order to get a better view of the athlete. From all sides came cries for mercy, passionate and insistent, which soon turned into one fierce roar. The giant was now the darling of the people, who, above all things, worshipped physical strength; for the time he was the greatest personage in Rome.

The Lygian understood that the mob were demanding his pardon and freedom, but his thoughts were not upon himself alone. For a time he looked about him, then he approached the imperial seat, and, holding the maiden on his outstretched arms, he raised his eyes in supplication, as if to say: "Take pity on her! Save her! For her sake this has been done."

The spectators understood his desire. The sight of the fainting girl, a mere child in comparison with the gigantic Lygian, had its effect upon the crowd and the soldiers and senators. That slender figure, white as if cut from alabaster, her swooning condition, the awful peril from which the giant had rescued her, and finally her beauty, moved every heart. Some thought that the Lygian was a father begging mercy for his child. Pity burst forth like a flame. Enough of blood and death and tortures! On every side arose entreaties for mercy from voices broken by sobs.

Ursus, still carrying the girl in his arms, moved around the arena, and, by eye and gesture, begged mercy for

the girl. Then Vinitius started up from his seat, leaped over the barrier which separated the front seats from the arena, and, running to Lygia, threw his toga over her naked body. Then he rent the tunic on his breast and exposed the scars of wounds received in the Armenian war, and stretched his arms out towards the people.

The enthusiasm of the crowd now passed all bounds. The mob stamped and howled. Voices demanding mercy grew terrible in their insistence. People not only took the part of the athlete, but rose in defense of the maiden and the soldier. With flashing eyes and clenched fists thousands of spectators turned towards Caesar. He, however, demurred and hesitated. He cherished no hatred for Vinitius nor did he particularly desire the death of Lygia, yet it would have given him pleasure to see the body of the girl torn by the horns of the bull, or the tusks of beasts. His cruelty and his degenerate disposition found a strange delight in such sights. And now the people wished to deprive him of one. This thought angered him. Wrath burned red on his bloated face. His self-love made it hard for him to yield to the will of the people. On the other hand, his cowardice prevented him from opposing it.

He looked around among the Augustales to see if he could discover thumbs pointing downwards to give the verdict of death. But Petronius held up his hand and looked almost defiantly into Caesar's face. Vestinius, superstitious yet enthusiastic, who feared ghosts but not the living, also gave the sign for mercy. So did Scevinus, the Senator, and Nerva, and Tullius Senecio, and the famous warrior, Ostorius Scapula, and Antistius, and Piso Vetus, and Crispinus, and Minucius Thermus, and Pontius Telesinus, and, most important of all, Thrasea, who was adored by the people.

In view of this opposition, Caesar dropped the emerald from his eye with an expression of scornful indignation. Tigellinus, who wished to spite Petronius, bent over him and said: "Yield not, O divine one! we have the pretorians at our command."

Nero turned to the place where Subrius Flavius stood, in command over the pretorians. He saw something which he little expected. The face of the old Tribune, hitherto always devoted to him, was now set and stern, although bathed with tears, and his hand was raised in sign of mercy.

Meantime the masses had become enraged. Clouds of dust rose from beneath the stamping feet, and filled the amphitheatre. Mingled with the shouts were heard cries: "Ahenobarbus! matricide! incendiary!"

Nero became frightened. In the circus the people were masters of the situation. Former Caesars, and especially Caligula, had ventured sometimes to withstand the popular will, and the consequent disturbances sometimes ended in bloodshed. Nero's position was different. Not only as a comedian and a singer did he need the favor of the people, but also as a bulwark against the Senate and the patricians. Since the burning of Rome he had striven to win it by all means, and so had turned the anger of the people against the Christians. He understood that further opposition would be perilous. A riot begun in the circus might spread over the city, and produce incalculable results.

Once more he looked at Subrius Flavius, at Scevinus, the centurion, a kinsman of the Senator, at the soldiers; and, seeing everywhere knitted brows, and stern eyes fixed upon him, he gave the sign for mercy. Then thunders of applause burst out and echoed from the highest to the lowest seats. The people were now assured of the safety of the condemned ones. From this moment they passed under their protection. Caesar himself would not dare to molest them further.

CHAPTER XXIV

Bithynian slaves bore Lygia to the house of Petronius. Vinitius and Ursus accompanied her. They made haste in order to place her as soon as possible under the care

of the Greek physician. They spoke no word, for, after the experiences of the day, speech seemed to have forsaken them. Vinitius was scarcely conscious. Again and again he repeated to himself that Lygia was saved, that neither imprisonment nor death in the circus menaced her longer, that their misfortunes were ended once and forever, and that now he was carrying her home and would never part from her again. From time to time he bent over the open litter to look at the face of his beloved, which in the moonlight appeared still as if in sleep, and he repeated to himself: "This is she! Christ saved her!" He remembered also that, while he and Ursus were carrying her from the Spoliarium, an unknown physician had looked at her and assured him that the girl was living and would surely recover. This thought filled him with such delight that he grew weak and was obliged to lean upon the arm of Ursus. Ursus looked up at the star-studded sky and offered up a silent prayer.

Quickly they moved along the streets in which newly built houses gleamed white in the moonlight. The streets were deserted save where here and there they came upon groups of ivy-covered people, who sang and danced before porticos to the accompaniment of flutes, taking advantage of the marvellous night and the holiday season, unbroken since the beginning of the games. Only when they were near the house did Ursus cease praying, and, in a low voice, as if he feared to waken Lygia, said:

"Oh, master, the Saviour preserved her from death. When I saw her on the horns of the bull I heard a voice in my soul crying, 'Defend her,' and this I knew was the voice of the Lamb. The prison had robbed me of my strength, but in that moment He restored it to me, and He inspired the cruel multitude to speak in her behalf. Praise be to Him!"

And Vinitius answered: "Glorified be His name!"

He could speak no further, for tears choked him. He felt an uncontrollable desire to fall down upon the earth and thank the Saviour for the miracle and mercy He had vouchsafed.

They had now reached the house. The servants, warned by a slave who had been sent ahead, swarmed out to meet them. Paul of Tarsus had converted the greater part of these people. They knew of the misfortunes of Vinitius. Great was their joy at sight of the victims rescued from the power of Nero. It increased still more when Theocles, the physician, after examining Lygia, pronounced that she had suffered no serious injury, and that when the exhaustion produced by the prison fever had passed, she would surely recover.

During the night she became conscious. Awakening in the gorgeous chamber lighted with Corinthian lamps, and fragrant with the scent of flowers, she knew not where she was nor how she had come hither. She recalled the moment when she had been tied to the horns of the chained bull and beholding above her the face of Vinitius, lighted by the pale glow of the lamp, she imagined that she was no more upon earth. Her thoughts were confused. She thought that she had been halted somewhere on the way to Heaven on account of exhaustion and weakness. Not feeling any pain, she smiled at Vinitius and attempted to ask him where they were, but could speak only in a low whisper, so that Vinitius could scarcely catch his name. He knelt beside her, and, laying his hand softly upon her forehead, said: "Christ saved thee and returned thee to me!"

Her lips murmured some unintelligible words, her bosom heaved, and she fell into a deep sleep, which the physician was expecting, and from which he said she would awaken to life and health.

Vinitius remained on his knees by her, sunk in prayer. His soul was transported with so mighty a love, that he forgot himself entirely. Theocles now returned to the chamber, and from behind the lace curtain the golden head of Eunice appeared frequently. At last the cranes outside in the garden announced the dawn of day, but Vinitius still knelt, embracing in imagination the feet of Christ, and not knowing or hearing what was going on about him. His heart, full of thanksgiving, burned like

a sacrificial flame, and he was carried away by his ecstasy to the very portals of Heaven.

CHAPTER XXV

After Lygia was liberated, Petronius, lest he should offend Caesar, went to the Palatine with other Augustales. He wished to hear what they were saying, and especially to find out whether Tigellinus was plotting anew to destroy Lygia. Both she and Ursus were now under the protection of the people. No one could molest them without creating a tumult. But Petronius, knowing how the powerful prefect of the pretorians hated him, thought it likely that Tigellinus, powerless to injure him directly, would try to revenge himself upon his nephew.

Nero was in high dudgeon because the show had ended in a way quite different from his wishes. At first he would not look at Petronius, but the latter, preserving a calm temper, approached him with all the freedom of the Arbiter of Elegance, and said: "Do you know, O divine one, what has struck me? Compose a song about the Virgin who, at the command of the ruler of the world, was rescued from the horns of a wild bull, and returned to her lover. The Greeks are impressionable, and I am certain that such a song will delight them."

Despite his vexation, Nero was pleased with the suggestion, and for two reasons: In the first place, it was a good subject for a song, and, secondly, he could glorify himself as the magnanimous ruler of the world. He regarded Petronius kindly, and said:

"Yes, mayhap thou art right, but would it become me to chant my own praises?"

"Thou needst not mention thyself by name. In Rome, everybody will know who is the hero of the song, and from Rome the news will spread all over the world."

"Art thou sure this would meet with approbation in Achaea?"

"By Pollux! it will," cried Petronius. And he took

his departure, feeling certain that Nero, who loved to weave reality into his literary inventions, would not spoil the theme. Thus the hands of Tigellinus would be tied. But this did not alter his plans of sending Vinitius away from Rome as soon as Lygia's health would allow it. When he saw him the next day he said:

"Take her to Sicily. As things have turned out, you need fear Caesar no longer, but Tigellinus is perfectly capable of poisoning you both, if not for his hatred for you, out of hatred to me." Vinitius smiled and replied: "She was on the horns of a wild bull, and yet Christ saved her."

"Sacrifice then a hecatomb to Him," said Petronius, impatiently, "but do not expect Him to save her a second time. Dost thou remember how Aeolus received Ulysses when he asked him a second time for favoring winds? Gods do not like to repeat themselves."

"As soon as she is restored to health," said Vinitius, "I will take her to Pomponia Graecina."

"And thou wilt do well, since Pomponia is lying ill. I heard it from Antistius, a cousin of Aulus. In the meantime, occurrences will take place here to make people forget you, and in our day, those who are forgotten are the happiest. May fortune be thy sun in winter, thy shade in summer."

He left Vinitius to his happiness while he went himself to inquire of Theocles concerning the life and health of Lygia.

She was out of danger. Exhausted as she was after the prison fever, foul air and discomfort would have ended her life. Now she was surrounded by the tenderest care, and not merely by plenty but by luxury. By order of Theocles, she was borne daily into the gardens of the villa. She would spend hours in these gardens. Vinitius would adorn her litter with anemones and irises to remind her of the hall of the Auli. Hand clasped in hand, they frequently spoke of the past, as they sat under the spreading trees. Lygia told Vinitius that Christ had allowed him trials and terrors for the express purpose

of changing his soul and raising it to Himself. And Vinitius acknowledged that this was true. He felt, indeed, that there was little in him of the former patrician who had known no law save his own will.

There was no bitterness in these memories, however. It seemed to both of them that whole years had rolled over their heads and that the terrible past lay very far behind. A feeling of calmness possessed them which they had never experienced before. A new and blissful life lay before them. In Rome Caesar might rage and fill the world with terror, but they felt that they were under the protection of a far mightier power. They need have no further fear of Caesar's rage or malice, as if he had ceased to be master of their lives. Once, about sunset, they heard the roar of lions and other wild beasts; formerly these sounds would have frightened Vinitius as a bad omen, but now the lovers regarded each other with a smile and raised their eyes toward the glow of the sunset. At times Lygia, still very weak and unable to walk unaided, fell asleep in the quiet of the garden. Vinitius watched over her, and, regarding her sleeping face, the thought would come to him that this was not the same Lygia whom he had met at the home of Aulus. Indeed, the prison and the sickness it had brought had impaired somewhat her beauty. When he saw her at the house of Aulus, and when he came to take her from Miriam's house, she was as beautiful as a statue, but now her face was almost transparent, her arms were thin, her body emaciated by illness, her lips pale, and even her eyes seemed less blue than formerly. The golden-haired Eunice, who brought flowers for her and costly rugs to cover her feet, seemed like a Cyprian deity in comparison. Petronius, seeing that she had lost so many of her charms, shrugged his shoulders and thought that this shadow from Elysian fields was not worth the trouble, and pain, and torture which was sapping the life of Vinitius, but Vinitius, now in love with her spirit, loved her all the more, and when he watched her as she slept, he felt as if he were watching over the whole world.

CHAPTER XXVI

The news of Lygia's miraculous rescue spread rapidly among those Christians who had escaped destruction. Believers came to look upon her to whom the grace of Christ had been so manifestly shown. First came Nazarius and Miriam, at whose house Peter, the Apostle, was concealed, and after them came others. All of them, together with Vinitius, Lygia, and the Christian slaves of Petronius, listened with rapt attention to the narrative of Ursus, as he related how a voice had spoken to his soul and commanded him to struggle with the wild bull. All departed much consoled, and, believing that Christ would not allow his followers to be exterminated in this vale of tears before His coming to the day of judgment, and this hope supported them, for the persecution was not yet over. Whomever public opinion denounced as a Christian, him the officers of the city seized and dragged to prison. The number of victims, indeed, were growing fewer, because the majority of the faithful had been seized and tortured to death. The Christians who were left had either deserted Rome to wait in distant provinces until the storm was over, or were concealing themselves in hiding places, not daring to assemble for common prayers except in sand pits in the outskirts of the city. But the persecution was still going on, however, for, though the games were over, the newly arrested were preserved for future series of games or were convicted without delay. Though the Roman people did not believe that the Christians had caused the conflagration, still they were denounced as the foes of mankind and the state and the edict against them remained in full force.

For a long time the Apostle Peter did not venture into the house of Petronius, but at last one evening, Nazarius announced his arrival. Lygia, who was now able to walk unaided, and Vinitius hurried to meet him and embraced

his feet. He greeted them with all the greater emotion because so few sheep remained in the fold over which Christ had placed him, and the fate of whom filled his great heart with anguish. Consequently, when Vinitius said to him: "O Lord, through your intercession, the Saviour gave her back to me," he replied: "He gave her back to you, because of your faith and that not all the lips which praised Him might be silent." Evidently he was thinking then of the thousands of his children who had been torn to pieces by wild beasts, of those crosses which had filled the arena, and those fiery pillars in the gardens of the "Beast," for he spoke with great emotion. Vinitius and Lygia noticed also that his hair had grown quite white, that his body was bent, and that his face gave as much evidence of sadness and suffering as if he had passed through all the pains and tortures which had been endured by the victims of Nero's rage and malice. But they both understood as Christ had delivered Himself to torture and death nobody could avoid such suffering. Nevertheless the sight of the Apostle, bent by age and pain, pierced them to the heart. So Vinitius, who intended in a few days to take Lygia to Naples to meet Pomponia there and go on to Sicily, entreated him to leave Rome with them. But the Apostle laid his hand on the head of Vinitius, and replied:

"I hear in my soul the words of the Lord, which he spoke to me on Lake Tiberius: 'When thou wert young, thou didst gird thyself and go whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hand and another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldst not;' it becomes me, therefore, to follow my flock."

And when they were silenced by the words, although they did not understand them, he added:

"My toil is nearly over; I shall find refuge and rest only in the House of the Lord."

And then he turned towards them and said: "Remember me, because I have loved you as the father loves his children, and whatever ye do in life, do it for the glory

of God." With these words he raised his aged hands and blessed them; they nestled up to him, feeling that this perhaps would be the last blessing they should receive from him.

But it was destined that they should see him once again. A few days later Petronius brought dreadful news from the Palatine. It had been discovered that one of Caesar's freedmen was a Christian, and on him were found letters of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and also letters of James, John, and Judas. Peter's presence in Rome had been known to Tigellinus, but he thought that the Apostle had perished with the thousands of other believers. Now it was evident that the two leaders of the new faith were still alive and that they were in Rome. It was determined that they must be found and captured at any price, because it was believed that only with their deaths could the hated sect be eradicated. Petronius was told by Vestinius that Caesar himself had issued an order to cast Peter and Paul in the Mamertine prison within three days, and that whole detachments of the pretorians had been sent to search all the houses in the Trans-Tiber.

As soon as he heard this Vinitius resolved to warn the Apostle. In the evening, he and Ursus donned Gallic mantles, whose hoods covered their faces, and made their way to the house of Miriam, situated in the outskirts of the city at the foot of the Janiculum Hill. On the way they saw houses surrounded by soldiers, led by unknown persons. This division of the city was alarmed. Here and there groups of curious people had assembled. Centurions went about examining the prisoners and endeavoring to gain information about Simon Peter and Paul of Tarsus.

Ursus and Vinitius, however, outstripped the soldiers and arrived safely at the house of Miriam, where they found Peter surrounded by a handful of the faithful. Timothy, Paul's assistant, and Linus were at the side of the Apostle.

On hearing of the approaching danger, Nazarius led

all by a hidden passage to the garden gate, and then on to some deserted quarries a few hundred yards from the Janiculum Gate. Ursus was obliged to carry Linus, whose bones, broken by tortures, had not yet knit together. But when they had entered a quarry they felt safe, and by the light of a torch which Nazarius lit, they held a consultation, carried on in low voices, as to the best means of saving the life of the Apostle who was so dear to them. "Master," said Vinitius to Peter, "let Nazarius at the break of day guide thee to the Alban Hills. We will find thee there and take thee to Antium, where a vessel waits to transport us both to Naples and Sicily. It will be a blessed day and hour when thou shalt enter my house and bless my home."

All the others approved this plan and urged the Apostle to accept, saying: "Take refuge, O Shepherd. Stay not in Rome. Preserve the living truth, so that it may not perish with us and with thee. Hear us, who implore thee as our father."

"Do this in the name of Christ," cried others, clinging to the Apostle's garments. But Peter answered: "My children, who knows when the Lord will mark the end of his life?"

But he did not say that he would not leave Rome, and he was in doubt as to what course to pursue, because, for some time, uncertainty and fear had stolen into his soul. His flock was dispersed, his work had come to naught. The Church which, before the burning of the city, had flourished like a great tree, had been annihiliated by the power of the "Beast." There was nothing left but tears and the remembrances of agonies and death. The sowing had yielded an abundant crop, but Satan had trampled it down. Legions of angels had not come to rescue the perishing, and Nero sat upon the throne of the world, terrible and more powerful than ever, Lord of the sea and of the land. Many a time had the fisherman blessed the Lord, stretched his hands towards Heaven in his loneliness and asked: "O Lord, what shall I do? How can I, a powerless old man, wage war against the invincible

power of evil, which Thou hast allowed to rule and to whom Thou hast granted victory?"

And from the depths of his anguish he cried out in his soul: "The sheep which Thou didst command me to feed are no more. Thy Church is no more. In Thy Capital are only sounds of mourning. What are now Thy commands? Am I to stay here, or shall I lead forth what remains of Thy flock to glorify Thy name in concealment somewhere beyond the sea?"

He hesitated. He believed that the living truth could not perish, that it must prevail. But at times he thought that the hour had not yet come, that it would come only when the Lord should descend upon earth on the Day of Judgment, in glory and power greater a hundredfold than those of Nero.

Often it seemed to him that if he left Rome the faithful would follow him, and then he would lead them far away to the shady groves of Galilee, to the quiet waters of the Lake of Tiberius, to throw in their lot with shepherds as peaceful as doves or as the sheep that grazed there in the valleys. And the heart of the fisherman was filled with a yearning for peace and rest, and for the lake and for Galilee. His eyes frequently moistened with tears.

But the moment he made up his mind a sudden fear and anxiety seized him. How was he to leave that city whose sacred soil had drunk the blood of martyrs and where so many dying lips had given witness to the truth? Should he alone shrink from his fate? And what answer could he make to the words of the Lord: "These have suffered death for the faith, but thou didst flee"?

He passed nights and days in anxiety and distress. Others whom lions had torn to pieces, who had expired on crosses, who had been burned in the gardens of Caesar, now slept in peace after their moments of torture. But he could not sleep and suffered greater tortures than any of those invented by persecutors for victims. Often the dawn whitened the roofs of houses while he was still crying from the depths of his suffering heart: "O

Lord, why didst Thou order me to come here and found Thy capital in the den of the 'Beast' "?

During all the thirty-four years since the death of his Master, he had known no rest. With staff in hand he had travelled over the wide world to spread the good tidings. His strength had been exhausted by his travels and toils, and at last, when in this city, the Capital of all the world, he had established the work of his Master, the fiery breath of malice had blighted it and he saw that the struggle must be undertaken anew. And what a struggle! On one side Caesar, the Senate, the people, the legions, encircling the world with chains of iron, lands innumerable, such power as was never seen before; and on the other side, he, so weakened with age and toil, that his trembling hand could scarcely carry his staff.

Often he told himself that he was no match for the great Caesar and that Christ alone had the power to uphold him. These thoughts passed through his careworn head as he listened to the prayers of the last handful of his faithful followers, who, surrounding him in an ever narrowing circle, besought him with imploring voices:

"Hide thyself, O Rabbi, and deliver us from the power of the Beast." Linus himself at last bowed before him his tortured head:

"Master," he said, "the Saviour commanded thee to feed his sheep, but they are here no longer, or they will disappear on the morrow. Go, therefore, where thou mayst still find them. The word of God still lives in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Ephesus, and in other cities. What wilt thou gain by staying in Rome? If thou shouldst fall, thou wilt only magnify the triumph of the Beast. The Lord has not foretold the limit of John's life. Paul is a Roman citizen and cannot be condemned without a trial. But if the powers of hell prevail against thee, O teacher, those who have lost heart already will ask: 'Who is greater than Nero?' Thou art the rock upon which the Church of the Lord is founded. Let us die, but suffer not anti-Christ to prevail over the vicegerent of God, and return not here till the Lord

has crushed him who shed the blood of innocents."

"Regard our tears," repeated all who were present. Tears coursed down the cheeks of Peter also. After a time he rose, and, stretching his hands over the kneeling people, said:

"May the name of the Lord be glorified and may His will be done!"

CHAPTER XXVII

At dawn of the following day two dark figures were stealing along the Appian Way towards the valley of the Campania. One of them was Nazarius, the other the Apostle, Peter, who was leaving Rome and his distracted brethren. In the East the sky was already assuming a slight tinge of green, which changed gradually into a saffron color. From out the shadows appeared trees with silvery foliage, white marble villas and the arches of aqueducts stretching along the plain toward the city. The green tinge of the sky was becoming shot with gold. Soon the rays began to redden and illuminate the Alban Hills, which appeared as if wrapped in a violet frame. The dawn was mirrored in drops of dew trembling on the leaves of trees. The haze grew thinner, and unveiled a wider view of the plain, the houses that dotted it, the cemeteries, towns, and groups of trees, among which gleamed the white columns of temples.

The road was deserted. The peasants who brought vegetables to the city had evidently not yet harnessed their horses. The blocks of stone with which the road was paved as far as the mountains echoed from the wooden-soled shoes of the wayfarers.

The sun rose over the hills, and then a wonderful vision burst upon the Apostle. It seemed to him that the golden disc, instead of rising higher and higher in the sky, came gliding down from the heights and moved along the road. Then Peter stopped and said:

"Dost thou see the brightness approaching us?"

"I see nothing," replied Nazarius.

Peter, shading his eyes with his hands, continued: "Some figure is approaching us in the gleam of the sun."

But no sound of footsteps reached their ears. Nazarius saw only that the trees in the distance were trembling as if shaken, and that the light was spreading more widely over the valley. With amazement in his eyes he looked at the Apostle.

"Rabbi, what troubles thee!" he cried in alarm.

Peter dropped his staff; his eyes looked straight ahead, his mouth was open, his face expressed wonder, delight, ecstasy.

Suddenly he fell upon his knees, with his hands stretched out, and cried:

"O Christ! O Christ!" and he pressed his face towards the earth, as though kissing some one's feet. There was a long silence. Then the voice of the old man was heard, choked with tears:

"Quo Vadis, Domine?" (Whither goest Thou, O Lord?)

Nazarius did not catch the answer, but to Peter's ears came a sad, sweet voice, which said: "As thou art deserting my people, I go to Rome to be crucified, for the second time."

The Apostle lay on the ground, his face in the dust, motionless and silent. It seemed to Nazarius that he had fainted, or perhaps even that he was dead. But suddenly he arose, and, without a word, turned back towards the City of the Seven Hills. The lad, seeing this, repeated like an echo:

"Quo Vadis, Domine?"

"To Rome," replied the Apostle.

And he returned.

Paul, John, Linus and all the faithful greeted him with consternation in their eyes. Their alarm was all the greater because, at daybreak, just after Peter's departure, the pretorians had surrounded the house of Miriam and had searched it for the Apostle. But to all questions he

simply answered in a calm voice: "I have seen the Lord." And in the evening he went to the Ostian Cemetery to teach and baptize those who wished to bathe in the Water of Life, and afterwards he went there daily, followed by increasing crowds. It seemed that from every tear of the martyrs there were born new believers, and that every groan in the arena reverberated in thousands of breasts. Caesar wallowed in blood; Rome and the whole Pagan world went mad. But those who were weary of crimes and bloodshed, those who were down-trodden, those whose lives were a succession of misery and oppression, all the weary and the sorrowful, and the heavy-laden, came to listen to the wonderful tidings of that God, who, moved by pity for men, had given Himself to be crucified in order to atone for their transgressions.

When they found a God they could love, they found that which the world at that time could not give, the happiness born of love. Peter understood that Caesar, with all his legions, could not crush the living truth, that it could not be quenched in tears or blood, and that now was the commencement of its victory. He understood now why the Lord had turned him back from the threshold of his journey. The city of pride, of crime, of debauchery, and of power, was now becoming His City, and the double capital, whence would issue the rule of the flesh and of the spirit.

CHAPTER XXVIII

At last the hour of both the Apostles had come. But, as if to complete his work, it was given to the fisherman of the Lord to rescue two souls in his very prison. Two soldiers, Processus and Martinianus, his guards in the Mamertine prison, were baptized by him. But the hour of torture was at hand. Nero was not in Rome at the time. Sentence was passed by Helius and Polythetes,

two freedmen, to whom Caesar had intrusted the government of Rome in his absence. Peter was first flogged, according to law, and the next day was taken outside of the city walls, toward the Vatican Hill, where he was to suffer death on the cross. The soldiers were surprised at the numbers that gathered before the prison. They could not understand how the death of a common man and an alien could excite such interest. They knew not that this retinue was composed not of the merely curious, but of believers, who wished to accompany the great Apostle to the place of his execution. At last, in the afternoon, the gates of the prison were thrown open and Peter appeared in the midst of a detachment of pretorians. The sun was already slanting towards Ostia; the day was clear and calm. Peter was not required to carry his cross. It was supposed that on account of his years he would not be able to support its weight. He walked slowly. The faithful could catch an unobstructed view of him.

When his white head showed itself amid the iron helmets of the soldiers, a wail arose in the throng, but ceased almost immediately, because the face of the old man was so serene and shone with such joy that it seemed to all that this was not a victim going to his execution, but a conqueror celebrating his triumph.

And such was really the case. The fisherman, usually humble and bent, now walked erect, towering above the soldiers, and full of majesty. Never before had there been such dignity in his bearing. He looked like a monarch attended by the people and soldiers. From all sides came voices: "Behold Peter going to the Lord!" All seemed to forget that he was going to torture and to death. The crowd marched in a solemn concourse, feeling that since the death on Golgotha, nothing so great had taken place, and that as the first sacrifice had redeemed the world, this was to redeem the city.

People stopped on the road and gazed with wonder at the old man, but the faithful, placing hands upon one another's shoulders, said: "Behold how a just man dies,

one who knew the Lord and proclaimed love to the world!" And those who had halted to gaze upon the Apostle, walked away, saying: "Verily, this is not a criminal!"

Along the way, the noises and the cries of the streets were hushed. The procession wound along by newly-built houses and the white columns of temples, above which hung the deep blue sky, calm and serene. They moved in silence, save when, at times, the arms of the soldiers clashed, or the murmur of prayers arose. Peter caught the low-breathed prayers, and his face shone with an increasing delight, for his glance could hardly compass those thousands of believers. He felt that his work was crowned with triumph, and now he knew that the truth which he proclaimed all his life would overwhelm everything like a sea, and that nothing could restrain the waves. Thinking thus, he lifted up his eyes and said: "O Lord, Thou didst command me to conquer this city, which rules over the world, and I have subdued it. Thou didst command me to found thy Capital in it, and I have done so. Now, O Lord, it is thy citadel, and I am going to Thee, because my work is done."

As he passed by the temples he cried: "Ye will become the temples of Christ!" Gazing at the crowds of people that swarmed before his eyes, he said: "Your children will be the servants of Christ." And he went on with the consciousness of victory achieved, aware of his services, aware of his power, calm, and great. The soldiers took him across the Pons Triumphalis, or Bridge of Triumph, as if unwittingly testifying to his triumph, and led him on toward the Naumachia and the Circus. The faithful from the Trans-Tiber joined the procession, and swelled it to such an extent that the centurion who commanded the pretorians, appreciating now that he was escorting a high priest, surrounded by his congregation, grew alarmed because of the smallness of his force. But no cry of indignation or anger arose from the crowd. All felt the solemnity of the moment, and the faces of the believers were grave and expectant. Some of the faith-

ful, recalling that at the death of the Saviour the earth opened in terror, and the dead rose from their graves, thought that now some portents would appear, so that the death of the Apostle would not be forgotten in the ages to come. Others said to themselves, "Perhaps the Lord will choose the hour of Peter's death to descend upon the earth, as He promised, and judge the world." With this idea they commended themselves to the mercy of the Saviour.

All about there was a great calm. The hills appeared as if resting and basking in the sun. At length the procession stopped between the Circus and the Vatican Hill. Some of the soldiers began now to dig a hole, others placed the cross and the hammers and nails upon the earth, waiting till all the preparations should be finished. The crowd, hushed and solemn, fell upon their knees. The Apostle, his head glorified by the sun, turned for the last time toward the city. Far away below them the gleaming Tiber could be seen; beyond was the Campus Martius. Higher up was the mausoleum of Augustus; below were the great baths which Nero had just begun to build; still lower was Pompey's Theatre, and beyond them, partly visible and partly screened by other buildings, were the Septa Julia, a multitude of porticos, temples, columns, towering edifices. Finally, far away in the distance, were the hills studded with houses whose summits faded away in the blue haze, the abodes of crime but of power, of madness but of order, all these forming the city which had become the throne of the world, its oppressor and yet its law and its peace, omnipotent, invincible, eternal. Peter, surrounded by the soldiers, gazed over this scene as a ruler and king looks upon his inheritance, and thus he addressed it: "Thou art redeemed and mine." And no one there present, not merely among the soldiers digging the pit in which the cross was to be planted, but even among the faithful, could divine that the real ruler of that city stood amongst them; that Caesars would pass away, that waves of barbarians would come

and go, that ages would vanish, but that this old man would hold there uninterrupted sway.

The sun slanted still more towards Ostia, and had become large and red. The whole western sky was bathed with the glow of the dying day. Then the soldiers approached Peter to strip him of his garments. But he, who had been bowed in prayer, now suddenly stood erect and stretched forth his right hand. The executioners paused as if in awe at his attitude. The faithful scarce dared to breathe, thinking that he desired to speak. Unbroken silence prevailed. But he, standing on the height, with his right hand extended, made the sign of the cross, blessing in the hour of his death—

"Urbi et Orbi!" (The City and the World.)

On that same beautiful evening another detachment of soldiers led along the Ostian Way Paul of Tarsus, towards a place called Aquae Salviae. He also was followed by a band of the faithful whom he had converted. Whenever he recognized a friend, he stopped and talked with him, for the guard treated him with greater consideration because he was a Roman citizen. Beyond the gate known as Tergemina he met Plautilla, the daughter of the prefect, Flavius Sabinus, and noticing that her youthful face was wet with tears, he said: "Plautilla, daughter of eternal salvation, depart in peace. Only lend me your veil to cover my eyes as I go to the Lord." Taking the veil, he went on with a face as full of joy as that of a laborer returning home after a day's toil. His thoughts, like those of Peter, were calm and serene as that evening sky. He gazed in thoughtful contemplation over the plain which extended before him, and upon the Alban Hills, bathed in light. He recalled his journey, his pains and labors, the trials he had overcome, the churches he had founded, in all lands and beyond all seas, and he felt that he had earned his rest, that his work was completed He knew that the seed he had sown would not be scattered by the breath of malice. He was departing from this life with the certainty that the conflict against the

world which the spreading of the truth had occasioned would result in victory. A peace beyond understanding filled his soul.

The road to the place of execution was long, and the shades of evening were falling. The mountains became purple and their bases were gradually veiled in shadows. Flocks were wending their homeward way. Here and there groups of slaves walked along with their implements upon their shoulders. Children at play before the houses on the road looked with wonder at the soldiers. On that evening the transparent, balmy air seemed filled with peace and harmony, which, as it were, rose from the earth and floated heavenward. And Paul felt this, and his heart was filled with joy at the thought that to this harmony of the earth he had added a note which did not exist before, but without which the whole earth was like sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.

And he recalled how he had taught the people charity; how he had admonished them that though they should give all they possessed to the poor, and though they learned all languages, all mysteries, and all sciences, they would be nothing without love, which is kind, patient, which does not return evil, does not crave honor, suffers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures to the end.

His whole life had been spent in teaching people this truth. And now he said within himself: "What power can equal it? What power can conquer it? Can Caesar overcome it, though he had twice as many legions, twice as many cities, the seas and the lands and nations?"

And like a conqueror he went to his reward.

The escort finally left the main road and turned eastward along the narrow path leading to the Aquae Salviae. The red sun was lying low on the heather. The centurion halted the soldiers at the fountain, for the time had come. Paul threw Plautilla's veil over his arm, intending to cover his eyes with it, and for the last time he raised those eyes, filled with indescribable peace, towards the eternal light of the evening, and prayed. Yes, the

hour had come; but now he saw before him a long road of light leading to Heaven, and to himself he repeated the same words which formerly he had written in the consciousness of duty done and the end at hand:

"I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

CHAPTER XXIX

In Rome madness still reigned, so that the erstwhile conqueror of the world began, through lack of a ruler, to crumble to pieces. Even before the last of the Apostles had died there came the conspiracy of Piso, and after that, such a merciless decapitation of the most prominent heads in Rome that even those who looked upon Nero as a god began to see in him a god of destruction. The city was in mourning. Terror reigned in its houses and in all hearts. Yet the porticos were decorated with ivy and flowers, because it was not permitted to bewail the dead. When the people awoke in the morning they asked themselves whose turn it would be to-day. The retinue of ghosts following Caesar increased every day.

Piso paid with his head for his conspiracy. And a like fate befell Seneca and Lucan, and Fenius Rufus, and Plautius Lapranus, and Flavius Scevinus, and Afranius Quinetianus, and the dissolute companions of Caesar's followers, Tullius Senecio, and Proculus, and Araricus and Cugurinus, and Gratus and Silanus, and Proximus, and Sabrius Flavius, once entirely devoted to Nero, and Sulpicius Asper. Some perished on account of their villany, some by fear, some on account of their opulence, some because of their courage. Caesar, dismayed by the number of the conspirators, placed soldiers upon the walls, and held the city as if in a state of siege; sending out every day centurions bearing decrees of death to suspected houses. The condemned humbly bowed to the de-

crees of Caesar, sending him letters full of flattery and of thanks for his sentences, and willing to him a part of their fortunes, in order to save the rest for their children. It seemed at last that Caesar was overstepping all bounds, in order to discover to what depths the people had degenerated and how long they would suffer the bloody rule. After the conspirators were put to death, their relatives, friends, and even their acquaintances, suffered the same fate. Dwellers in the magnificent palaces erected after the conflagration, when they went out on the street, were sure to see a whole succession of funerals. Pompeius, Cornelius, Martialis, Flavius Nepos and Statius Domitius perished because accused of being wanting in love for Caesar; Novius Priscus, because he was a friend of Seneca; Rufius Crispus was deprived of the right of fire and water, because he had formerly been the husband of Poppaea. The great Thrasea fell a victim to his virtues. Many were put to death on account of their noble origin. Even Poppaea fell a victim to the momentary rage of Caesar.

The Senate cringed before the terrible potentate, erected temples in his honor, placed wreaths upon his statues, and established priests for him as if he were a god. Senators, in fear and trembling, ascended the Palatine to magnify the song of the "Perio Donices," and to go mad with him amid orgies of naked bodies, wine and flowers. But meantime, from beneath, in the soil wet with the blood and tears of martyrs, grew silently, but ever stronger and stronger, the seed that Peter had sown.

CHAPTER XXX

Vinitius to Petronius:

We are kept well informed, dear friend, of what is going on in Rome, and what we do not know we learn from your letters. When a stone is cast in the water, the waves go farther and farther in a widening circle, and so

a wave of madness has reached us from the Palatine. Carinus, sent by Caesar into Greece, stopped here on his way. On his march he despoiled cities and temples to replete the treasury. From the sweat and tears of the people will be built the "Golden House" in Rome. It is possible that the world heretofore has not beheld such a house, but it has not beheld such injustice either. You know Carinus; Chilo was of his ilk until he redeemed his life with death; but his men have not come yet to towns lying in our immediate neighborhood, for the reason, perhaps, that they have neither temples nor treasures. You ask us whether we are safe. I will say only that we are forgotten, and let that suffice for an answer. At the moment that I am writing these words, I see our peaceful bay and Ursus in a boat upon it, letting a net down into the quiet waters. My wife sits beside me, spinning wool. Our servants sing in the shadow of the almond trees. What peace and quiet, oh, my dear friend! What a contrast to our old-time alarm and suffering! 'Tis not the Fates, as thou assertest, but Christ, our Lord and our God, who blesses us. We are not strangers to tears and to sorrow, for our religion teaches us to grieve over the afflictions of others. But these tears hold within them a comfort unknown to thee, for, when our lives are ended, we shall find again the beloved ones who are perishing and have perished for the truth of God. Peter and Paul are not dead to us. They have been reborn into glory. We see them with the eyes of our souls, and though our bodily eyes may weep, yet our hearts rejoice with their joy. Yea, dear friend, we are happy with a happiness that can know no end, because death, which for thee is the end of everything, is for us only the beginning of a higher happiness.

So the days and the months pass in perfect peace. Our servants and slaves believe as we do in Christ, and in Christ's gospel of love. So we all love one another. Often when the sun has set, or when the moon shines on the water, Lygia and I hold converse about the past, which now seems all a dream. When I remember how near was

that beloved head to torture and death, I glorify God with my whole soul, for He alone could have rescued her from the arena and returned her into my hands. Petronius! thou hast known what comfort and fortitude that religion can give in the midst of afflictions, what courage in the face of death. Now come and witness the joy it can give in every-day life. The world has not hitherto known a God whom it could love. So men did not love one another. Hence arose all manner of afflictions. For just as light proceeds from the sun, so does happiness proceed from love. The law-givers and the philosophers have not known this truth; it had no existence in Greece or in Rome—and by Rome I mean the whole world. The dry, cold philosophy of the Stoics, which appeals to so many who would fain be virtuous, does indeed temper the heart as steel is tempered, but it hardens rather than improves it. But why do I write this to thee, who art more learned and more clever than I? Thou hast known Paul of Tarsus, and hast held converse with him more than once; hence thou knowest better than I how empty and how vain, what a glittering show of meaningless words are the teachings of rhetoricians and philosophers compared to the religion which he preached. Thou canst recall the question he asked thee: "If Caesar were a Christian, would ye not all feel safer, more secure in your possessions, freer from alarm, and more certain of the morrow?" Thou hast told me that our creed was an enemy of life. I tell thee now, that if from the beginning to the end of this letter I simply repeated these three words, "I am happy," I could not sufficiently emphasize that happiness. Thou mayest make answer that my happiness is Lygia. There is truth in that, oh, my friend. But that is because I love her immortal soul, and each loves the other in Christ. Such love can know neither separation, nor disloyalty, nor alteration, nor age, nor death. Even after youth and beauty have passed away, and our bodies are withered, and death touches us, love will remain, for the spirit remains. Ere my eyes were opened to the light I would have burned down my own home for sake of

Lygia; but now I say that I did not know what love was until Christ showed me the way. He is the source of love and joy. Contrast thy luxuries, filled full as they are with alarm; thy joys, uncertain of the morrow; thy orgies, with the lives led by Christians, and an answer must at once be forthcoming. But for a better comparison, come to our hills, fragrant with thyme; come to our olive groves and ivy-covered shores. Such calm awaits thee as thou hast never before experienced, and the sincere love of loyal hearts. With thy noble soul thou wilt find joy here. Thy nimble wit will see the truth, and seeing it, will learn to love it. Men like Caesar and Tigellinus may hate it, but none can be indifferent to it. Oh, Petronius! Lygia and I find solace in the thought that thou wilt soon be with us. Be well. Be happy. Come and visit us!

Petronius received Vinitius's letter in Cumae, whither he had departed, together with other Augustales, in the company of Caesar. His long struggle against Tigellinus was nearing its end. Petronius knew that he must be beaten in the end, and he understood the reasons. As Caesar fell gradually lower to the rôle of the comedian, mountebank, charioteer, as he sank deeper in a slough of coarse dissipation, the Arbiter of Elegance became a nuisance to him. Ever in the silence of Petronius Nero read disapproval. His very praises Nero interpreted as sarcasm. The illustrious patrician offended his self-love and provoked his envy. His riches and his magnificent works of art had become objects of desire both to the sovereign and to his powerful minister. Petronius had been spared with a view to this journey to Achaea, in which his taste and his knowledge of Greek art might prove useful. But Tigellinus attempted to prove to Caesar that Carinus excelled the Arbiter in taste and erudition, and that he would be better able to arrange the games, receptions and triumphs in Achaea. From that moment the doom of Petronius was sealed. But Caesar had not the courage to send him his sentence in Rome. Both Caesar and Tigellinus called to mind that this indolent aesthete,

who turned day into night, and was interested only in art and banquets and luxury, had shown great power of work and energy at the time when he was pro-consul in Bithynia, and afterwards when consul in the capital. He commanded great respect in Rome, where he possessed not only the love of the people, but also of the pretorians. None of Caesar's advisers could foresee exactly how Petronius would act, so it seemed safer to get him out of the city, and to strike at him in a province.

Consequently, Petronius received an invitation to go with other Augustales to Cumae. Though he suspected treachery, he went along, in order, perhaps, not to make a display of open resistance, and to show once more to Caesar and to the Augustales a face joyful and free from care, and so gain a final victory before death over Tigellinus. Meanwhile, the latter accused him of friendship with Senator Scevinus, who was the head and front of Piso's conspiracy. Servants of Petronius remaining in Rome were imprisoned, his home was surrounded by pretorian guards. When he received this news he showed no alarm or concern, but, with a smile, said to such Augustales as he was entertaining in his own beautiful villa in Cumae:

"Bronzebeard likes not direct questions, so you will see how confused he will be when I ask him whether it was he who ordered my people to be imprisoned." Then he bade them to a feast before "the longer journey." He was preparing for the banquet when the letter from Vinitius arrived. On its receipt Petronius grew somewhat thoughtful, but in a little while his face resumed its wonted calm expression. During the evening he answered as follows:

I rejoice at your happiness and wonder at your good heart, for I had not thought that two lovers could remember a third person at a distance. You not only have not forgotten me, but invite me to Sicily to share with me your bread and your Christ, who, as thou writest, has showered happiness upon you. If this be true, honor Him. I

think, however, O friend, that Lygia was restored to thee partly by the aid of Ursus, and partly, also, by the Roman people. If Caesar were another man, I should think that further persecutions would be stopped through consideration of thy kinship to him through the granddaughter of Tiberius. But if thou believest that Christ was the sole cause of Lygia's rescue, I will not dispute with thee. So, spare no sacrifices to Him. Prometheus also sacrificed himself for mankind, but, alas! Prometheus is probably an invention of the poets, while truthful men have told me that they have seen Christ with their own eyes. I have come to think with thee that He is the most worthy of the gods.

I remember the question of Paul of Tarsus, and think that if Bronzebeard lived according to the precepts of Christ, I might find time to visit you in Sicily. Then, in the shade of trees and by fountains, we could discuss all the gods and all the truths that have been debated among the Greek philosophers of all time. To-day, I must give thee a brief answer.

Two philosophers only do I respect; the name of one is Pyrrho, and Anacreon is the other. The rest I will sell thee cheap, together with the whole school of Greek Stoics, and our own. Truth abides somewhere so high that the gods themselves cannot see it from the heights of Olympus. To thee, dearest friend, thy Olympus seems still higher, and, standing upon it, thou callest down to me: "Ascend, and thou wilt see such sights as thou hast not dreamed of heretofore." Perhaps. But I answer: "Friend, I have not the legs!" And when thou reachest the end of this letter thou wilt acknowledge that I am right.

No! Happy spouse of the Princess Aurora! Thy creed is not for me. Should I love the Bithynians who carry my litter, the Egyptians who prepare my bath? Am I to love Bronzebeard and Tigellinus? By the white knees of the Graces, I swear to thee that even if I desired to love them, I could not! There are in Rome at least one hundred thousand persons who have either crooked

shoulders, or big knees, or thin legs, cross eyes, or heads too large for them. Dost thou command me to love them also? Where can I find that love if I do not feel it in my heart? And if thy God wishes that I love them all, why in His omnipotence did He not endow them with, for example, the forms of Niobe's children, which thou hast seen on the Palatine? Whoever loves beauty cannot for that very reason love ugliness. One may disbelieve in our gods, but it is possible to love them as did Phidias, Praxiteles, Myron, Scopias, and Lysias.

Even should I desire to go whither thou wouldst lead me, I could not. Thou believest, like Paul of Tarsus, that some time beyond the Styx, in some Elysian fields, thou wilt see thy Christ. Well, let Him say then Himself whether He would accept me with my gems, my myrrhene vase, my editions of Sozius, and my golden-haired Eunice. I smile at the thought of this, my friend, for Paul of Tarsus declared to me that, for Christ's sake, it was necessary to renounce rose garlands, banquets, and luxuries. True, he promised me other happiness, but I replied that I was too old for new joys, and that roses will always delight my eyes, and that the odor of violets will always be sweeter to me than the smell of some dirty neighbor from the Suburra.

There are reasons why thy happiness cannot be mine; but there is also another reason, which I reserve for the last. It is that death calls me. For thee, life is beginning to dawn; but for me, the sun is already set, and twilight is descending upon my head. In other words, I must die, O dear one!

It is not worth while to speak at length about this. It had to end thus. Thou, who knowest Bronzebeard, wilt readily understand. Tigellinus has conquered, or, rather, my victories reached their end. I have lived as I pleased, and will die as pleases me.

Do not grieve. No god has promised me immortality, hence I am not taken by surprise. But thou art mistaken, Vinitius, in affirming that only thy God teaches men to die calmly. No; our world knew before you that when

the last cup is drained it is time to depart, to rest, and it knows yet how to do this serenely. Plato says that "Virtue is music, and that the life of a philosopher is harmony." If this be true, I shall die as I have lived, virtuously.

I should like to say farewell to thy divine wife, with the words I once spoke to her in the house of Aulus: "I have seen many persons, but thy equal, never."

So if the soul is something more than what Pyrrho thinks, mine will fly to thee on the way to the limits of the ocean, and will alight at thy house in the form of a butterfly, or, as the Egyptians believe, of a hawk. Otherwise, I cannot come. Meantime, let Sicily take the place of the Gardens of Hesperides; may the divinities of the field and the forest and the fountains scatter flowers on your path, and may white doves build their nests on every acanthus of the columns of your house!

CHAPTER XXXI

Petronius did not deceive himself. Two days later young Nerva, always devoted to him, sent his freedman to Cumae with the news of all that had happened at Caesar's court.

The death of Petronius had already been decreed. On the following day a centurion was to be sent to him with orders to stop at Cumae and wait there for further instructions; another messenger was to bring the death sentence a few days later.

Petronius received the news brought by the freedman with unruffled demeanor, and said:

"Thou wilt take to thy master one of my vases that will be handed to thee before departing. Say to him in my name that I thank him with all my heart, for now I shall be able to anticipate the sentence."

And suddenly he broke into a laugh like a man who has just thought of a splendid project, and enjoys beforehand its fulfillment.

And that same evening his slaves ran about bidding all the Augustales, with their ladies, to come to a banquet at the beautiful villa of the Arbiter of Elegance.

Petronius spent the afternoon hours writing in his library. Afterwards he took a bath, and then commanded the robe folders to dress him. Splendid and adorned like a god, he went to the dining hall to cast a connoisseur's eye upon the preparations, and then to the gardens, where youths and Grecian maidens from the islands were weaving garlands of roses for the banquet.

Not the slightest anxiety was portrayed on his face. The servants only knew that the banquet would be something out of the common, for he had ordered unusual rewards to be given those with whom he was satisfied, and light floggings to those whose work should not please him, or to those who had previously deserved blame or punishment. He directed that the lute players and the singers should be generously rewarded. Finally, seating himself in the garden beneath a beech, through whose foliage the sun made bright spots upon the ground, he called Eunice to his side. Gently touching her temple, he gazed at her with the admiration with which a connoisseur looks upon a statue fresh from the chisel of a master.

"Eunice," asked he, "dost thou know that for a long time thou hast not been a slave?" She lifted up to him her calm, heavenly blue eyes, and shook her head in denial. "Master," she said, "I will always be thy slave."

"But, mayhap, thou dost not know," continued Petronius, "that this villa and these slaves, weaving garlands over yonder, and all that is here, the fields and the herds, belong from henceforth to thee."

At these words Eunice suddenly fell back a few steps, and in a voice choked by emotion inquired:

"Why dost thou say this, master?"

She approached him again, and stared at him with eyes full of fear. Her face grew as pale as a sheet. He still smiled, and smiling, said only one word—"Yes."

There was a moment of silence, broken only by the

rustling of the wind in the leaves of the boxwood trees.

Petronius might almost have imagined that he had in front of him a statue cut in white marble.

"Eunice," he said, "I desire to die in peace."

The girl, gazing at him with a heart-broken smile, whispered, "Master, I obey thee."

In the evening the guests arrived in large numbers. They had been at many a banquet of Petronius, and knew that, in comparison, even Caesar's feasts seemed dull and barbarous. Many knew well that the clouds of Caesar's displeasure hung over the Arbiter of Elegance. But this had happened so many times, and so many times had Petronius known how to disperse them with a clever word or a bold act, that no one actually believed any grave danger impended over him. His gay face and customary careless smile confirmed the common impression. The beautiful Eunice, to whom he had expressed his wish to die in peace and to whom his every word was as the word of an oracle, preserved perfect calmness of expression. There were marvellous gleams in her eyes, as of inner joy. Youths with hair in golden nets stood at the threshold of the banquet hall. On their heads were wreaths of roses. In conformity with ancient custom, they warned the guest to step over the threshold with the right foot foremost. A slight fragrance of violets pervaded the hall; lights burned in many-colored Alexandrian glasses. Beside the couches stood little Grecian girls, whose office it was to anoint with balsams the feet of the guests. The walls were lined by lute players and Athenian singers, awaiting a signal from their leader.

The table service was resplendent with luxury, but that luxury did not offend the most critical taste. It seemed to be a natural development. Cheerfulness and freedom from restraint pervaded the hall with the fragrance of the violets. The guests as they entered felt that neither compulsion nor menace was hanging over them, as they were wont to feel in Caesar's palace, where insufficient praise for a song or poem might be paid for by the forfeit of one's life. The sight of the lamps, of the ivy-covered

goblets of iced wines imbedded in snow, and of the exquisite dishes, cheered the hearts of the banqueters. The conversation became as lively as the buzzing of a swarm of bees over an apple tree in blossom. Now and then it was interrupted by a burst of gay laughter, a murmur of praise, or too loud a kiss, imprinted upon a bare, white shoulder.

As they drank their wine, the guests spilled from their goblets a few drops to the immortal gods as a petition for protection and for favors to the host. It mattered not that many of them disbelieved in the gods. Custom and convention commanded this. Petronius, reclining beside Eunice, chatted of the current Roman gossip, of the latest divorces, love, romances and races; of Spiculus, who had recently earned fame in the arena, and of the newest books which had appeared at the shops of Atractus and Socii. Pouring out some wine, he explained that he poured it out only in honor of the Cyprian goddess, the oldest and greatest among all the gods, the only immortal one, enduring from the beginning, and dominating every one.

His conversation was like a sunbeam, which lights up every new object, or like a summer breeze which rustles the flowers in the garden. At length he nodded as a signal to the leader of the choir. Then the lutes emitted a gentle sound, and fresh young voices responded to them. Then girl dancers from Cos, Eunice's countrywomen, moved nimbly, their rosy bodies shining through translucent robes. At the end an Egyptian soothsayer forecast the future of the guests from the motions of gold fish inclosed in a crystal vessel.

When they had had enough of these amusements, Petronius lifted himself slightly from his Syrian cushion, and said, carelessly:

"Friends, pardon me if I ask a favor from you at this banquet. It is this: Let every guest accept from me as a gift the goblet from which he spilt wine in honor of the gods and for my well-being."

The goblets of Petronius glittered with gold and

precious stones and masterly carvings. Although the distribution of gifts was customary in Rome, joy filled the hearts of the revellers. Some of them thanked him and praised him loudly, others said that Jupiter himself had never honored the gods in Olympus with such precious gifts. There were even some who hesitated about accepting them, since these gifts were of such unprecedented value. Petronius, lifting up a Myrrhene vase resembling a rainbow in brilliancy, said: "This is the goblet from which I spilt wine in honor of the lady of Cyprus. Henceforth, let no lips touch it, and let no other hand pour out wine from it in honor of any other deity." He cast the precious vessel down upon the floor, strewn with lilac-colored crocuses, and when it broke into small fragments, he said, in answer to the general amazement:

"Dear friends, be merry and marvel not. Old age and debility are sad comrades for the last years of life, so I will give you a good example and good advice. As you see, you need not wait for them, but before they come you can depart of your own free will, as I depart."

"What is thy intention?" cried a number of voices at once.

"I intend to be merry, to drink wine, to hear music, to gaze at these divine shapes which you see by my side, and then to fall asleep with my head crowned with flowers. I have already taken leave of Caesar. Will you hearken to what I have written to him as a farewell?"

He took a letter from under the purple cushion, and read as follows:

"O Caesar, I know that thou anxiously awaitest my coming and that thy loyal and friendly heart yearns for me day and night. I know that thou wouldst rain gifts upon me, make me the prefect of thy pretorian guards and command Tigellinus to become that for which the gods created him, an overseer of mules in those, thy lands, which thou didst inherit by the poisoning of Domitius. Pray pardon me if now I swear to thee by Hades and by the shades of thy mother, thy wife, thy brother, and

Seneca, who are all there, that I cannot go to thee. Life is a great treasure, my beloved, and from this treasure I have known how to select the most precious gems. But in life there are many things which I cannot longer endure. Pray do not think that my feelings were hurt, because thou didst kill thy mother, thy wife, and thy brother, because thou didst burn Rome, and send to Erebus all the honest men in thy Empire. No, grandson of Chronos, death is the common doom of humanity, and one could expect nothing else from thee. But, to lacerate my ears for long years to come with thy singing, to see thy mountebank legs contorted in the Pyrrhean dance, to listen to thy playing, thy declamation, thy poems, O wretched Suburban versifier, would be too much for my strength, and has aroused in me a wish to die. Rome stops her ears to avoid hearing thee, the world laughs at thee, and I wish no longer to blush for thee, nor can I do it. The howls of Cerberus, my beloved, though they resemble thy singing, will less offend me, for I have never been his friend, and I do not need to be ashamed of him. Farewell, but sing no more; kill, but write no poems; poison, but dance not; turn incendiary, but do not play on the harp. Such are the wishes and such the last friendly advice sent to thee by the Arbiter of Elegance."

The banqueters were struck dumb with terror. They knew that the loss of the Empire would have been a less cruel blow to Nero, they knew also that the man who wrote that letter must die. At the same time pallid fear seized them for their own sakes, because they had been present at its reading.

Petronius burst into a laugh so genuine and so gay, that it seemed as if the whole matter were merely an innocent joke. Then he glanced around him and said:

"Be merry, and drive away fear, nobody need boast that he heard this letter read. I myself will boast of it only to Charon, when he ferries me over the river."

He nodded to the Greek physician and stretched his arm out to him. The skillful Greek, in the twinkling of an eye, bound it with a golden ribbon and opened

the vein at the bend of the elbow. The blood spouted out upon the cushion and covered Eunice, who supported the head of Petronius. Bending over him she said:

"Master, didst thou think that I would leave thee? If the gods would grant me immortality, and Caesar were to give me the rule of the whole world, I would yet go with thee."

Petronius smiled. Raising himself slightly, he touched his lips to hers and replied:

"Come with me." Then he added: "Thou hast truly loved me, my divine one."

And she stretched her rosy arm out to the physician and soon her blood flowed out and mingled with his.

He gave a sign to the leader of the choir. Again harps and voices resounded. First they sang Harmodius, then the song of Anacreon, in which the poet complained of having found under the tree the frozen and weeping child of Aphrodite, of having brought him in, warmed him back to life and dried his wings and then of how the ingrate had in return pierced his heart with an arrow, since which time he had lost all peace of mind.

Petronius and Eunice, reclining against each other, beautiful as two gods, listened smiling and growing paler. When the song was ended, Petronius ordered more wine and fresh dishes to be served, and commenced a discussion with the guests seated near him about all those graceful trifles which usually occupied the minds of the banqueters. Finally he summoned the Greek to bind up his veins for a moment, explaining that drowsiness overpowered him and he wished to yield himself to slumber before death put him in eternal sleep.

And thus he fell asleep. When he awoke, the head of the maiden lying beside him had already assumed the color of a white lily on his breast. He placed it on the cushion to get a final look at it. Then his veins were opened again. At his nod the singers began a new song of Anacreon, and the harps accompanied it so gently as

not to drown the words. Petronius grew paler and paler. When the last sounds died away, he turned once more to the banqueters and said:

"Friends, acknowledge that with us perishes—" but he could not finish. With a last movement his arm embraced Eunice, his head fell on the cushion and he breathed his last.

But the banqueters, gazing at these two white bodies resembling two marvellous statues, well knew that with them had perished all that remained to them in their world, its poetry and beauty.

EPILOGUE

The revolt of the Gallic Legions under the leadership of Vindex did not at first threaten to be very serious. Caesar was barely thirty-one years of age. No one dared to hope that the world would so soon be free from the nightmare that oppressed it. It was remembered that many revolts had already occurred during previous reigns without resulting in any change of rule. Thus, in the time of Tiberius, Drusus had crushed the revolt of the Pannonian Legions, and Germanicus that of the Legions upon the Rhine. "And who," said the people, "could possibly succeed Nero, now that all the descendants of the divine Augustus have been put to death?" Others, looking at the Colossus, conceived him to be a Hercules, and thought that nothing could break his power. There were even those who, after his departure for Achaea, longed for his return, since Helius and Polythetes, to whom he had relegated the government of Italy, ruled even more cruelly than himself.

Nobody was certain either of life or property. The law ceased to be a protection. Human dignity and virtue had disappeared. Family ties had been dissolved. Debased hearts dared not even to admit of hope. From Greece came rumors of the unparalleled triumphs of Caesar, of the thousands of crowns he had won, and of the thousands of rivals he had defeated. The world seemed to be one vast orgy, bloody, and farcical. The opinion prevailed that virtue and heroic deeds had come to an end, that the time had arrived for dancing and music, for debauchery, for blood, and that the whole future trend of life would be in this direction. Caesar himself, to whom rebellion opened the way for renewed plundering, cared little for the mutinous legions, or for Vindex, and did not even restrain his joy over the revolt. He would not leave Achaea. Only when notified by Helius

that further delay might result in the loss of his dominions did he set out for Naples.

There he again played and sang, disregarding the news of still more serious events. Vainly did Tigellinus warn him that former rebellions of the Legions had no leader, whereas now there stood at their head a descendant of the ancient kings of Aquitania, a tried warrior of great renown. Nero's answer was: "Here the Greeks listen to me—they who alone know how to listen, and who alone are worthy of my singing." He said that his first duty was owed to art and fame. But when at last he learned that Vindex had declared him to be a bad artist, he rose and set out for Rome. The wounds which Petronius had inflicted upon his self-love opened anew. He was anxious to seek justice from the Senate for such an unparalleled injury.

On the road he came across a bronze group, representing a Gallic warrior vanquished by a Roman knight. He took this as a favorable augury. Thenceforth he mentioned the mutinous legions and Vindex only as a jest. His entrance into the city cast into the shade all former events of this sort. He drove the very chariot which Augustus had used in his triumph. One arch of the circus was destroyed to open a passage for the procession. The Senate, the knights, and an immense multitude came out to greet him. The walls trembled with the shouts of "Hail Augustus! hail Hercules! hail the divine one, the unconquerable one, the Olympian, the Pythian, the Immortal." Behind him were borne the crowns that he had worn, and tablets inscribed with the names of the cities where he had triumphed and of the champions he had defeated. Nero himself was intoxicated. With emotion he asked the Augustales, who surrounded him, what was the triumph of Julius Caesar compared to this. The thought that any mortal could dare to raise a hand against such a demigod could not cross his mind. He felt himself to be truly an Olympian and therefore safe. Enthusiasm and the madness of the multitude stirred up answering madness within him. In

fact, on that day of triumph, it seemed that not only Caesar and the city, but the whole world had gone mad.

The flowers and the piles of crowns hid the abyss that yawned beneath. Yet that very evening the columns and walls of the temple were covered with inscriptions denouncing the crimes of Nero, threatening the near approach of vengeance, and satirizing him as an artist. From lip to lip passed the words: "He sang until he awakened the Gauls."* Alarming news circulated throughout the city and swelled to monstrous proportions. The Augustales were seized with terror. People, uncertain what the future might bring forth, dared not express wishes or hopes, dared not even feel or think.

Nero, however, lived only in the theatre and in music. Nothing interested him save newly invented instruments and a new water organ, experiments with which were made on the Palatine. Childishly incapable of thought or action he deemed that he could avert all danger by promises of spectacles and exhibitions in the future. The people nearest to him, seeing that in lieu of providing means and an army he was exerting himself only to find apt expression for depicting the panic around him, began to lose their heads. Others, however, thought that he was deafening himself and others with quotations only to hide the alarm and disquietude of his soul. His acts became confused. Every day thousands of fresh plans passed through his head. At times he leaped up to combat the danger, commanding that his lutes and harps be packed upon wagons, and that his young slave women be armed as Amazons while he sent out orders to recall the legions from the East. At times he thought that he would conquer the rebellious legions, not by war, but by song. And he laughed within himself as he conjured up in his imagination the spectacle of the soldiers yielding to song. They would surround him with streaming eyes. He would sing to them a hymn of victory, after which a golden epoch would begin for him and for Rome. At times he called for blood. At others he proclaimed that

*In Latin this involves a pun upon Gallus, a cock.

Egypt alone would satisfy him. He recalled the soothsayers, who had promised him rule over Jerusalem. Then he would move himself to tears at the thought that as a wandering minstrel he would earn his own livelihood and be honored in far-off cities and countries. He would be honored, not as Caesar, the sovereign of the world, but as a poet, whose like had never yet been seen in the world.

Thus he struggled, fumed, played, sang, changed his plans, changed his quotations, changed his life, and transformed the whole world about him into a foolish dream, fantastic and horrible—a mad rout of bombastic expressions, wretched verses, groans, tears and blood. And all this while the cloud in the West was growing larger and darker every day. The measure was overfilled. The farce was nearing its end. When news came that Galba and all Spain had joined the rebellion he fell into maddened fury. He crushed goblets, overturned the tables at the banquets, and gave orders which neither Helius nor Tigellinus dared to carry out. To murder all the Gauls residing in Rome, to let loose the beasts from the menageries, to transfer the capital to Alexandria seemed to him sublime and astonishing deeds that could easily be accomplished. But the great days of his power had passed. Even the accomplices of his former crimes began to look upon him as on a madman.

The death of Vindex and the consequent discord that arose in the mutinous legions seemed for a moment to turn the scales in his favor. New feasts and new triumphs were ordered, new sentences were issued in Rome, when one night a courier, mounted on a foaming horse, came dashing in from the camp of the pretorians with the news that within the city itself the soldiers had raised the banner of revolt and had proclaimed Galba, Caesar.

Nero was asleep when the courier arrived. On waking he called vainly for the guards who at night watched the doors of his chambers. The palace was deserted save for the slaves who were plundering in the remoter quarters whatever could be carried away in a hurry. But the

sight of Nero frightened them away. He wandered through the solitary halls, filling them with cries of terror and despair. At last his freedmen, Phaon, Sporus and Epaphroditus answered his calls. They urged him to flee, saying there was not a moment to lose, but he continued to delude himself. Suppose he should array himself in his mourning robes and appeal to the Senate, could the Senate resist his tears and his eloquence? Suppose he should use all his oratory, his rhetoric and his talent of an actor, could any one in the world resist him? Would they not at least give him the governorship of Egypt?

Habituated to flatter him, his freedmen dared not even now to contradict him. All they could do was to warn him that ere he could reach the Forum the mob would tear him to pieces. They threatened that if he did not mount his horse at once they also would desert him.

Phaon offered him a hiding place in his own villa beyond the Nomentan Gate. At last they all leaped upon their horses and, covering their heads with mantles, galloped off toward the walls. The night was waning. The streets were already in motion and gave expression to the serious character of the situation. Soldiers, sometimes singly, and sometimes in detachments, were scattered throughout the city. When they had reached the camp, Nero's horse shied suddenly at sight of a corpse, the mantle slipped from his head, and a soldier who happened to be passing, recognized the Emperor. Confused by the suddenness of the apparition, he could only give a military salute. On passing the pretorian camp they overheard thunderous cheers for Galba. At last Caesar understood that the hour of death was at hand. He was smitten by alarm and by the reproaches of his conscience. He cried out that he saw a black cloud before him from which protruded faces, in which he recognized his mother, his wife, and his brother. His teeth chattered from fright, but even yet his comedian soul found a certain pleasure in the very terror of the moment. That the one-time omnipotent ruler of the universe had now lost everything

seemed to him to be the highest watermark of tragedy. True to himself he continued to play the leading rôle in it. The fever of quotation seized upon him, a passionate hope that those around him would remember them for posterity. There were moments when he cried out for death, and would have summoned Spiculus, the most dexterous of all the gladiators; there were other moments when he declaimed, "Mother, wife, brother, call me to death!" Vain and childish hopes still flashed up in him ever and anon. He knew that death was approaching. Nevertheless he could not bring himself to believe it.

They found the Nomentan Gate open. They galloped through, and passed by Ostranium, where Peter had taught and baptized. At dawn they arrived at Phaon's villa.

There the freedmen no longer concealed from him that the time for death had arrived. Then he commanded them to dig him a grave. He lay down on the ground, so that they might take his exact measurement. But at sight of the earth cast up by the spades a mortal terror seized him. His fat face paled. Clammy drops of sweat, like morning dew, stood out upon his forehead. He strove for delay. With a faltering, yet still theatrical voice, he cried that the hour had not yet come. Then he began to quote again. Finally he asked them to burn him. "What an artist is now perishing!" he repeated as if in wonder.

Meanwhile a messenger arrived from Phaon, announcing that the Senate had already pronounced sentence that the parricide should be punished according to ancient custom.

"What is that custom?" inquired Nero, with ashy lips.

"They will place thy neck in a fork, flog thee to death, and throw thy corpse into the Tiber," replied Epaphroditus quietly.

Nero bared his breast.

"It is true, then," he said, looking upward at the sky, and once more he repeated: "What an artist is perishing!"

The clatter of horses' hoofs was now heard. It was the centurion, coming with the soldiers for the head of Bronzebeard.

"Make haste!" cried the freedman.

Nero placed the knife to his neck, but he only pricked himself with a timid hand. It was evident that he never would have courage to drive the blade in. Then unexpectedly Epaphroditus pushed his hand. The knife entered to the hilt. Nero's eyes protruded from his head, horrible, immense, terrified.

"I bring thee life," exclaimed the centurion as he entered.

"Too late," answered Nero in a hoarse voice. A moment later he added: "This is loyalty."

Death had now seized his head. The blood from his huge neck spurted in a thick stream upon the flowers of the garden. His feet kicked the ground and he died.

On the morrow, the faithful Actea wrapped his body in costly stuffs and burned it on a funeral pyre drenched with perfumes.

So passed Nero, as passes the whirlwind, storm, fire, war, or plague. But even to this day the basilica of Peter rules over the city and the world from the heights of the Vatican.

Near the ancient Capena Gate rises to-day a little chapel with an almost obliterated inscription: Quo Vadis, Domine?

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Quo Vadis? Whither goest thou